Dear Bartender

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DEAR BARTENDER

Catherine Graham

Drunks die of their own accord, and exist thereafter like empty tortoise shells.

Leaving their beautiful wives to grow old, and their grandchildren to revere them as fables.

To sit up he had to build his momentum, rocking back and forth, his arthritic spine never allowing him to just simply stand upright.

"Just a snitch" he'd say through yellow hands, puffing on his cigarette.

Moments later the glass of Corby's whiskey would be brought to him by my father, then an adolescent.
The glass, still the deep tan of whiskey, the coloring of cola still mixing its way into the solution, only to become a trace of its former self.

"How did you sleep last night?" he'd ask my father, who the answer always escaped, with your eyes closed.

I don't think my father slept a wink waiting for his own to die, always asking himself, who was sleeping? what was awake?

I've been told stories. How the whiskey bubbled on your lips and the cigarette burned in your limp hand, the plume rising tight into the air, as you took your last shallow breathe.

For the first time, I hope there is a heaven looming above. so you can see me as I ponder what I might become
(stirring the whiskey and ice in my glass)
Looking for some sustenance to fill this shell.
I am the arbiter of night;
    Lord of vacant streets
        where mailboxes and
    fire hydrants stand

Silent-vigil
against the pink murmur of the dawn.

Molasses dreams
    pull words like fruit-
        from trees
    catching conspicuous notes
        falling
        from voices I thought I
    would never hear again.

Voices
    of back alley saints
    with wings as smooth as
    ravens’ claws.

Fill my lungs
    with the will of poets’ pasts.