

Spencer Riggi

## Four Forty Four

— he felt the deepest parts of himself churning when he sped down the on-ramp of I-5, preparing to merge with a buzzing assemblage of motorists of all variety and temperament, and for a moment the churning intensified as he glimpsed a collection of flowers on the side of the interstate, just beyond the barricade, in the approximate location his brother plowed through in a sudden, driver-assisted burst of momentum, and how there once was a picture of his brother on the memorial, how it was defaced by a still unknown person or persons and needed removal and how he'd yet to replace it, but these thoughts flashed and were gone as the flowers raced past his periphery, and seconds later gone from the rear view, and so his eyes returned to the road and cars in front of him, although that feeling lingered, lingered as he signaled his merge and held his breath and even once he'd switched lanes cranked the volume on the Stones until all sides of the car were pulsating with “woo woo's” and Jagger's “pleased to meet you's” so that the lingering feeling subsided to the rumbling of the bass in his belly and soon he was just driving, smooth down the parkway, drowning himself

in noise and whizzing forest and concrete and asphalt and white painted dashes and everything started to blur together, more and more with each blink, and a few blinks later he realized he was crying, so much that his whole body felt heavy, like descending into the depths of the ocean, pressure pushing his chest into his ribcage and lungs and an image barged into his brain, a teddy bear he saw once in the middle of a sun-scorched Kuwait street, smoke and dust in the air, stuffing pouring out of its eyes, and the entrails of a young legless man pouring out in buckets while he gripped and begged and screamed and how there was nothing that could be done and how he watched this young legless man die and how later on the quiet ride back to base he remarked in his journal that childhoods are left to fester and bleed out in the sand and through all the watery fuzz and pressure he didn't notice how fast he was going until the sirens sounded, so he pulled over, rolled down his window, hands tight on the wheel, and waited, taking deep breath after deep breath after —