

24HR Convenience

By Helena Trifillis

Fluorescent light spills out onto the street, crashing into black night
The limbo hours, up all night with your mind and your body
Your sharpness dulled as you drift through the AMs
Like a human moth drawn to every bright light
Enticed by the midnight portals appearing every two blocks

Flash of neon sign, “Open 24 HRS”
A soft halo forms in the doorway, an oasis in the dark

You enter
The store clerk, a gruff all-night angel
Barely looks up from stacking cigarette cartons

Outside, a homeless man shouts
“Day one! Call the police, it's only day one! Day one! Day one!”

There are those who live perpetually in limbo
Perpetually pacing the streets, asking for the time
You wonder what time even means to them anymore
When past, present, and future blur
Maybe every day is Day One

You wonder if, for them Heaven is a 24-hr convenience store
Inside lies a brief reprieve from the cold and the night
Shelves stocked with goodies they can't touch
Bright, saccharine packaging encasing short-lived artificial flavor
Tempting tastes they barely remember and cameras at every corner
Heaven on lock-down

They stagger down the aisles until the store clerk, a fed-up angel
Shoos them on, "if you ain't buyin' then get out!"

You know every portal will look like this
They all contain the same air, the same vibrant colors
Variations of the same guardian angel behind the counter
Selling scratch-offs, rearranging lighters
Every soul that enters is bathed in the same harsh light

Outside, another man on the street screams in agony
Later, sirens screeching

For some, day two never comes

Every portal the same except...

You step outside, immersed again in blackness.
You hand the homeless man outside a bag of chips
"God bless you," he says

"You too"