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Exit Only

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ERIN E. CAMPBELL

Exit Only

Some nights you want to get in your car
and just drive east
to chase the dawn
or rise up to meet it
with the largest styrofoam cup
of muddy Chevron station coffee available
that wants to be café con leché but can't
because you're in North Tampa, in Anglerville,
too near the university for divergent culture
without a map of the Southeastern United States—
you don't plan this, it just happens
you can't read the damn thing
anyway and someone
or Alex is beside you
through the midnight blinding storms on I-4—
we pee on the shoulder
because there are no rest stops
on eastbound 4 or welcome centers
there's nothing welcome about this highway
except its race to the ocean—
one U-turn decides that Cocoa Beach
is the exit you want
following the signs for Cape Canaveral
and when you finally stop and start
wandering barefoot across the star-spangled sand
the wind kicks up, throwing the Atlantic ocean
against the green silk ankle-length skirt
you wish you could shed
because it's wet now and cold
so you sit in the lee of Lois' Lounge
live music nightly, open 24 hours,

hugging your knees
wanting Alex to touch your palm or cheek
but he can't because Chana always presses against his
brain stem
reminding him of her broken faith
so instead he makes love to your mind
even though the waves remind him
of *From Here To Eternity* also—
your body throbs
from toes to kneebacks to groin to breasts
with a vision of him naked on this dune
exposing all blemishes and hair
and browned, broad latissimus dorsi
when the light breaks over the Atlantic
gray light, too weak to push
aside piles of cumulonimbus crowding the horizon
you realize you've picked a lousy morning
but Alex encourages your curled body's sleep
as he manipulates the car away
from your disappointment, tracing the reverse route
to the University to get his bike
kisses your cheek
promises to write.