

Louis Armstrong Airport at Sundown

To the left: cosmic panels framing a crimson sky — blue-black into purple, purple into a murky red. Alliances of smoke from the chemical plants duel with the heavy haze of the humidity, until eventually they mix, creating an immense, unwavering force that chokes you, chokes on you, then spits you out onto the cement, still covered in a thick and unpleasant dew. But I am safe for now behind these panels. There is nothing else for miles but planes and plains of grass.

And then, dizzying white corridors absent of shadows: an overcompensation. It is as if they are saying, Yes, darkness lurks on the other side of these walls and beneath these milky tiles but within our fluorescent purgatory you are okay. I want to believe them, I do, but as the glow slides further down the sky and onto the asphalt in a gasoline puddle, the occasional body I walk past seems more like a spirit than anything else. And I am one of them— suspended here in a transparent half-life— floating around in limbo, and then with the clouds, before we are able to become opaque again. In here, beads are memorabilia of a tender, forgotten childhood. Out there, they lie among the spent shells.

Forward: I can see my feet gliding further, further, but I cannot hear the sounds they are supposed to make. I hear jazz, a saxophonic dystopia fading and echoing in my ears as if it is the farewell track of a closing world— a world closing in. But then, a pause, and at once it is Louis Armstrong's "Do you know what it means to miss New Orleans" in the background, and then the foreground, and suddenly my heart and ribs ache so badly. I think of myself and my family, the way we once were a long time ago, exhaling powdered sugar onto each other between stifled

giggles over a table stacked with beignets and hot chocolate, walking along the streets of the French Quarter where the conglomerate of brass strikes the air before dissipating into the energetic air of fervid conversation and song. These thoughts are too much for me to bear now.

When the song ends, and an unfamiliar tune replaces it, it feels like a haunting. In an effort to delay, or to distract, I turn around, and my eyes land on a clock like the moon, and I wonder if I'll ever have a place I can call home again. To the left, obscurity has won; time, 5:26 PM.