

Elizabeth Bishop Swipes Right

by Julia McConnell

after Elizabeth Bishop's "Arrival at Santos"

Here is a bar; here is a Wendy's;
here, after an endless diet of horizon, a parking lot;
asphalt cracked and buckling and –well, shit – the narrow spaces
are all taken outside the unmarked building,

with the heavy steel door. Across the street
by the real estate office, is where you should park
so your windows won't be bashed. *Oh, tourist,*
is this how this country is going to answer you

and your immodest demands for a different world,
and a better life, and complete satisfaction
of love at last, and immediately,
after twenty-four years of denial?

Get out your ID. Friendly is waiting,
the gruff butch behind the glass, writing down your name,
before buzzing you in to a cloud of cigarette smoke
and country music. This is still Oklahoma,

of course, not unlike any other bar in this town.
And football on TV, even some crosses on necks
as we make our thirsty way to the long line at the bar,
myself, and fellow lonely heart, Miss Bishop

navigating through the chaos of women spinning
in each other's arms across the dance floor
while Brooks and Dunn wail about Lorca's neon moon.
Oh, Miss Bishop! This is not the kind of joint

where you order wine. How 'bout a beer
or whiskey? Or a shot of tequila? Here comes Dezi,
she's just shaved her head, home from deployment.
Let's grab that table while we can.

There. We are settled. Listen, not
a lot of strangers here, so if they don't know
you, they're not likely to talk to you. It takes a while.
Buy some drinks, share your smokes, soon

you'll be a regular, or on the next bus out of town.
Do you wanna two-step? Throw some darts?
Or just sit back, watch the show, and chain smoke until
last call at 2 am? We'll call you a taxi, ha! Just kidding,

no taxis here. We'll walk you to your car,
drive behind you, or tell you to text us when you get home
safe, but never let you walk into the parking lot alone.
We are drilled into the interior.