

THIRD PLACE - 2022

The Dead Weight

The apartment held memories of a time before he left us.
A time when he was still alive. A time when we were still alive.
A fragile relic of how you and I were before he died.
Death is so cruel. Irreversible, unacceptable, final.
You began to sob the last time that we drove away from that haunted apartment,
uncontrolled and full-bodied,
in a way that you rarely see outside the confines of childhood.
You had to pull the car over. You were sobbing too much to drive.
I reached over for your hand, but you didn't want mine.
It is a hot iron to your tender hand.
You want a type of comfort that I could never bring.
You and I left the haunted apartment, but we packed the dead weight with us.
I was naive to think we could leave such a large oversized item behind.
How does one carry the dead weight of another through a relationship meant for two?
I simply cannot.

-Sara Shilling, 2021 graduate of University of North Carolina - Chapel Hill