

Clockwork

by Fred Osuna

5:17 a.m.

Bill is up before the sun. Mug in hand, he sips coffee on the open tailgate of his truck, one leg swinging like a metronome. He waits for the sunrise and for the old woman across the street. At any moment, she'll come outside to pick up the day's newspaper. He can see it resting beneath the blooming crape myrtle, its plastic wrapper glistening with dew.

1:51 a.m.

The paperboy sits in the back seat. He rolls, bags, and tosses the dailies as his father drives slowly through the neighborhood. As they round the corner by the community fountain, he takes aim at the old woman's tree and throws. The paper hits the slender trunk with a thwack.

1:45 a.m.

The old woman lies in bed, restless, tossing uncomfortably, waiting for the sound of the newspaper. Upon hearing it, she falls asleep.

5:31 a.m.

The old woman rises, dons a robe and peers through the blinds. She can see Bill's cigarette tip glowing red in the dark. She waits for him to leave. When she loses patience, she walks out to the crape myrtle and picks up *The Post*. Turning to go inside, she sneaks a look back at Bill. He waves, slides off the tailgate, empties the cold remains of his coffee cup onto the grass, and goes inside to start his workday with a shower.

