**Chinese Radio**

I used to work at the radio station on Kirby,

where my boss always stooped over when

he spoke, spine crooked as a penny-farthing,

hands trembling as he plucked each silver

knob, scattered across the soundboard like

*weiqi* games at my uncle’s. And I would

frantically note the glowing red button

flickering on and off and the peeling blue

painters tape labels across each panel, one

saying *In Deck* and another saying *Out*, and

wonder if the backwards looking ‘c’ was Mr.

Mannister’s handwriting or Ms. Cleement’s.

He’d pat my shoulder a little too hard and

hand over a tin of decaying butterscotches

which I would politely decline because the

dentist noted three new cavities last

Wednesday and another two to come. As he

left the sound room, he liked humming

Amazing Grace until it sounded less like

gospel and more like my pot bellied physics

teacher on a cold Tuesday after his wife

woke him up to start an argument about

dryer sheets and the merits of a cold wash,

which meant a pop quiz on linear

momentum and me craning my neck to look

at the answer to number 2 on my lab

partner’s sheet. Diane, who took algebra

with me two semesters ago, sorted the audio

files on the computer next to mine,

perpetually three smoke breaks away from a

highschool dropout and a radio station

full-timer, and always forgot to download

the *Heaven’s Truths* files because they were

last on the 10-point-font list of thirty-two, so

I’d have to sort them out myself, and when

she left for the day, she never said ‘bye’, just

played her indie rock loud enough to break

through the shiny new Bose’s that she saved

up for and swaggered out like she owned a

cherry red Bentley and not a half-eaten

Subaru. Not that I could speak because I

took the bus four times a week and failed

my driver’s test twice, once because I hit the

curb and another because I dented the sign

that says “DMV” which is the kind of irony

that gets you an auto-fail and a long drawn

out sigh. The kind of sigh that sits in the air,

moody and dull like jagged cracks in my

phone screen, the kind of sigh Carl from the

room over was fond of divulging at odd times

of the day for no apparent reason other than

to let the world know he was *so* above us.

Diane and I would look at each other and

roll our eyes, and for a second, we would be

something halfway resembling friends–an

occurrence that only ever happened twice

with the other time being the afternoon I

forgot my copy of *Korean Literature Now*

in my backpack and it fell on the floor when

I pulled my laptop out and Diane leaned

over and said she liked the issue with Lee

Ho-cheol’s *Panmunjom* so much that she

bought the book and tried to read it despite

her Korean being shit, and I asked if I could

borrow her copy and she said *maybe* but she

never did and that was the end of that

moment. In our sound room, I liked leaning

back in the leather chairs, chipped paint and

yellow gray underneath, letting the

Fuzhounese of an old woman sing me to

sleep, and it would almost feel like sleeping

at a friend’s house or a dry church on a rainy

night, like some refuge from a tired week,

and I would fiddle with the volume knobs,

the recorded tin repeating *Chinese Corner*

over and over again as I stirred my watered

down, pale as a country ballad coffee,

imagining the woman crooning through my

headphones as a bouncy, heavy smiling

mother or a thin whisper of a choir girl or a

sad, robotic man. Or Diane, Diane singing a

hymn in Fuzhounese, Diane picking her

nose, Diane looking lost in a room full of

people.