

Honor Grade

by John Riley

It was a surprise they put me in a dormitory, not a cell, with fourteen sets of bunk beds along two walls, windows with no bars, and that for two days no one threatened me, the kid with Penguin classics under his mattress. It was not a surprise when, on the third day, the man sat on my bunk without invitation and told me without being asked that he'd beaten his friend to death with a pool cue and still didn't know why and asked without caring which book was my favorite. I showed him my used copy of *Lady With a Little Dog*, except in that translation it was called *Lady With a Lapdog*. He said no man should be a lapdog. I agreed and told him the story. "Fuckin' cheaters," he said which made me think of my father and I told him about our drunken trip to Mexico, my dad and I, and how at fourteen I'd driven us over the Madres and through a town called Durango. It was a surprise that after I said Durango he stared at the wall of men wearing green shirts and green pants waiting to see what was supposed to happen and that he whispered "Madres at Durango" and then said I should shut-up he'd make sure I was okay but I should shut-up and the prisoners, so unlike me I was certain, schooled away, leaving behind an endlessness that didn't last.

