

Alarm Clock

Joy Arbor Karnes

Once wound, it ticks measured steps
until, held in too long,
its shrill shriek of morning breaks in
ripping calm
with panic-soaked sheets.

My alarm clock wears two bells
like earmuffs or Princess Leia's cinnamon
bun braids. A present from Aunt Sylvia
when playing with dolls was banished.

Once, I threw it under the bed —
it uttered a cry —
and I marked its silence
for months.

A crack, a scar on its face,
a wound it sees the world through.

I have learned to distrust
its judgment.
I have another alarm clock.
It plugs in, a glowing beacon
in a dark room
 (like McDonald's down
 a foreign road, ghost of familiarity
 left behind)
it can't sneak up on me. I awaken
softly to it.

But the other one keeps
with me, a scornful voice
saying, "put that poem
back in your mouth."