

**BEATRICE K. BALKCUM RENAISSANCE LITERARY AWARD WINNER &  
POETRY AWARD WINNER**

*Miss Dolly*

*Emma Padgett*

Every time I return to my dank little hometown,  
I think of her and where she might've ended up.  
Huge-teased platinum blonde hair,  
hoops almost the size of her face,  
in some new, expensive, trashy outfit.  
Some man was always being kicked out  
for the new lipstick stains on his collar.  
My momma would always tell me,  
"Don't mess around with her,  
that woman's a tramp. Nothin' but trash."

I'd see her down at the gas station sometimes,  
trying to win money from a scratcher,  
or pawning a cigarette off whichever unlucky bum  
happened to be sitting outside the door.  
She would buy me a Coke if I asked nicely enough.

I'd be walking home from work late at night,  
our few flickering streetlights doing little  
to illuminate the busted-up sidewalk.  
She'd meet me along the way  
and walk me up to my house, or  
at least as far as my daddy would let her.

I asked around today if anyone knew where she'd gone.  
It seemed like no one knew, and no one cared.  
They'd gotten their use out of her,  
so she'd moved on to some other  
rundown town, other desperate men.  
These days, I bum my own cigarettes,  
and I have to buy my own Cokes

while I walk home on the same battered sidewalk,  
without the sound of stilettos clicking next to me.

**POETRY AWARD WINNER**

# Belonging

*Emma Padgett*

Where is *our song*  
or a random  
*this reminded me of you?*  
The girls on the train this morning  
had bead bracelets on, each the same  
but in a different color.  
I doubt they'd ever taken them off.  
The barista greets the man in front of me with  
"Nice to see you again! The usual?"  
Sometimes nothing would mean more  
than just being usual.  
Expected.  
Loneliness longs for familiarity.  
A couple on the train home  
leaned into each other to read one book.  
They share comfort in silence.  
The street performer strums his guitar,  
waiting for a crowd to gather.  
He knows they will come.  
It'll be like every other night for him,  
surrounded by people who will always come.  
His crowd knows he'll be there.  
And I will be looking at the haggard man  
with a dirty hat full of dollar bills,  
somehow wanting what he has.