

## ***but mine, alone***

**Kristen Mallia**

I currently reside at The Outermost Hostel, my temporary home in Provincetown, MA, a space that simultaneously inspires and distresses me. The presence of others who once shared her is revealed in quiet ways: a wrinkled sheet, leftover shampoo, a stained curtain pulled gently around a hook. But the empty space also suggests a heightened isolation: spiderwebs in the corners, a naked pillow, a shelter that is not my own, but mine, alone. As the days pass, we grow more comfortable with one another, and my judgement of her imperfections becomes softer, less critical. I suppose my eyes have adjusted; with familiarity we see less clearly. But she is raw, and to wake with her is a foreign experience; warm sun shines through the stained windows and crisp air makes me cling to an old blanket that is not my own. How many others have you sheltered?

As our relationship grows, I adorn her with vintage ephemera. The brittle paper of my new collection of Valentines feels right at home against the old paint and porcelain. On Monday, we had intruders. Disruptive and bold, they've swept in and made themselves at home a bit too easily. Their sense of entitlement within the space feels like a violation. We share our resentment in silence, comforted only by the vision of their upcoming departure. With the uninvited guests extending their stay another night, I wonder if my comfort with this arrangement will ever return. Friends can become strangers in a single moment.