

SUSAN SOLOMON

State of Mind, 2018
Gouache on panel, 8 x 8 in



COURTESY FRAMEWORKS GALLERY IN SAINT PAUL, MINNESOTA

ANDREA DONDERI

Rivington

For a while there hadn't been much out the window but skunks and fog. The last audiobook ended this morning as we'd crossed down into California. Now there was nothing on the radio but talk shows for getting riled up or ballads for crying and by this point even those were sputtering out.

Rivington's email had mentioned two roads. They'll both get you there, he said, but the one you want cuts straight across the pass. The wrong one squiggles up into the mountains. I must have mixed them up, because the farmland gave way to forest twenty minutes ago. Now things were getting narrower and steeper and twistier. The first few spatters of rain were steady into a down-pour. It was getting dark fast and there wasn't anywhere to turn around.

I'd hoped we could make it through this last stretch without stopping, but in the seat behind me, Tupper was whimpering and panting a little. He probably had to pee. I did too. The headlights lit up a diamond-shaped sign, warning yellow, with the silhouette of a leaping deer.

It had been a couple of months since my job had evaporated. Our whole company had folded. I hadn't been attached to the work and I wasn't panicking yet about money, but "folded" was the right word for me too. I had no idea where to go next. My parents had owned a garden center near Louisville when I was growing up; sometimes I missed it. I'd posted something about maybe working with plants again.

And then Rivington (for the dozen-odd people who might have heard of him, that's *the* poet Will Rivington) piped up with a comment. His sister's husband's family ran a wholesale nursery out here, he wrote. They were expanding, they needed someone sane to help run the place. Why didn't I come visit and check things out?

Rivington had taken over our porch swing during his fellowship in Bloomington. My sister, Beth, and I adored him, but we hadn't heard much from him after we left town. Right around the time he signed the contract for *Value Propositions*, he'd moved away too: all the way back to California, near his family. His relatives ran gas stations, taught school, staffed vet clinics. They zoomed up and down the coast in convertibles they'd restored themselves, arms resting lazily on the window, music pouring from the radio, past seagrass and lupines, artichokes and cypress trees.