

the HARLEQUIN

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The armadillos on the side of the road
wear leather and chain mail.

Some of them are infected
with leprosy. Pastures are full

of fire ants and rattlesnakes,
but you can't hike there anyway.

This land is sewn with barbed wire,
every fence a warning.

I've heard ranchers will shoot
if you trespass. Still, I like it here,

driving with the windows down
in April, bluebonnets and Texas

mountain laurel blooming
like pieces of the sky. When I stop

at the general store, five faces lift
like the heads of spooked cattle.

They're gathered around a table
next to a shelf of candy and fly swatters.

We nod. One resumes eating a sandwich,
another shuffles a deck of cards.

The beer cooler hums,
and even the flies are still again

in the dust of windows. I've come
for one beer, but I buy a six-pack,

pull five bottles of Shiner Bock –
gold labels glossed with dew –

set them in the middle of the table
like a bouquet of wildflowers.

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