

On a Photo of the Lorraine Motel

by [Philip C. Kolin](#) in the [January 2023](#) issue

Men die once but he will be mourned each time
we hear his voice, like a promise out

of the Bible comforting us. He was shot
at Vespertime, when prayers are said

at monasteries and cathedrals. A high velocity
bullet smashed his jaw (the pulpit for his words).

Throats filled with the blues mourned that night
all through Memphis, and the Mississippi wailed.

The words of “Sweet Lorraine” were banished from the city.
And photos of the motel’s second floor were superimposed

on the second-floor theatre box where Lincoln
was shot: a palimpsest for memory. Two of the nation’s

greatest healers gunned down in April, such a cruel month,
but so close to the Resurrection. That second floor

was the mountaintop where Dr. King left a world coiled
in hate and harm. His bloodstained eyes saw

where his life had taken him and the suffering
that came upon him. He carried so many lives

within him in pilgrimages to desecrated places—
a bloody bridge in Selma; growling Birmingham streets—

speaking unarmed truths about dignity and
nonviolence in the midst of prejudice cocked

and aimed at him. More than 50 years since
his death, people still dream his dreams standing

with him as pastors Abernathy and Young point to where
that fatal gunshot was fired and beyond that

to the heavens where Dr. King ascended
that nefarious evening in Memphis.