Disposable

Poems

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Sheila-Na-Gig Editions

Labor

23 North

Pete Yorn's *musicforthemorningafter*
pours from the cracked
window of my hand-
me-down Buick with its one
working door handle.

Speakers crackle *I, live on*
a chain into the 5 AM
blackness of the interstate
& my coffee. Maybe it'll work

& I'll wake up soon. Another day
picking in the aisles. Match
sticker to item, slap it on, toss
it in the cart. Repeat. Clock

out. Take the interstate
an hour back home. Repeat
tomorrow & Wednesday
& the rest of the work

week. Because there's no
rest for the weary & no
jobs in my hometown
paying above minimum
wage & at least I get

weekends off & am done
before dusk, I tell myself,
avoiding the mass exodus
of 5 o'clock traffic flooding

outward from the city
to the hills & hollers
we call home.

Bad Track

Early mornings, pre-work or pre-church
or pre-Saturday errands, my mother spackled
her face with Cover Girl's Warm Beige, waved
her magic L'Oréal mascara wand in Deepest Brown
across her eyelids & repeated her regular incantation
into our apartment's only bathroom mirror:
Man, I look like five miles of bad track.

My dad fixed track for the C&O in the late
'70s & early '80s. He had long dark hair
then, told me how his boss hated hippies,
how it was always ten degrees warmer or colder
next to all that steel depending on the season,
how he witnessed the gray brains of his foreman's son
spackle the cracks in the track when Junior didn't hear
the engine round the bend. Noises echo in those hills, after all.

They call scars from injecting substances into one's veins
track marks, as though it's possible to track someone's history
through the scars they leave behind. Or maybe these small speckles
dotting elbows & the absences between toes are more
akin to tracking an injured animal, following its bloody sprinklings
until you locate the vacant body. My ex used to walk
to the 84 Lumber yard just across the train tracks
from our small apartment to visit his dealer, coming home
with a bun, enough baggies that he'd be able to lay down track
after track in the recording studio & play enough gigs to get more.

A few years back, a Norfolk Southern train fell off the tracks
in East Palestine without a way to trace the impact
of vinyl chloride, butyl acrylate & isobutylene on the fish,
soil, people who called (& still call) that place home. But it wasn't
the track's fault; instead some faulty rotor or axel or computer
should have functioned properly but failed. There is no person
to blame, no one to call & ask if symptoms should be tracked,
if the water is safe to drink, if the garden can be planted this year.

Home is sacred. No one wants their homes
or lives derailed. We don't want folks
tracking in dirt or dirty laundry; we deserve
safe spaces to examine the islands in our riverine veins,
to utter incantations in our bathroom
mirrors, to sing along to Dylan's *Blood on the Tracks* off-key.

Memories of a Cocktail Waitress Circa 2005

The men hold their sticks,
chalked at the tips, smashing
balls against one another, ordering

Mich Ultras & Budweisers
& my phone number, tipping me
when they remember as they tip

glass bottles to their chapped, thirsty
lips, puckered like the assholes they are
after the sixth beer settles in their guts.

Before Recycling the Beer Bottles at Night's End

We had to dump them. Drain
the chaw, its slosh & thick drips

slicking the stained
inside of a repurposed plastic
pickle bucket. Sometimes peeled

labels appeared, their silvers
& reds floating among the back-

wash. The once-white bucket
awash in taffy-brown bottom
dregs, bloated foamy cigarette

filters, flecks of leftover tobacco
sprinkling the surface like stars.

Autumn on the Tuckasegee River

Translucent white wisps
rise from the murky water,
ghosts of speckled trout
lured in by fly fishermen

who rise from the murky water
like ghosts of their younger selves
lured in by fly fishermen
dreaming of futures unseen.

These ghosts of their younger selves
chase the sun like these men chase trout
dreaming of futures unseen
fleeting hopes, catch & release.

They chase the sun like these men chase trout
exuding power that ends in failure
fleeting hopes, catch & release.
They return empty-handed,

exuding power that ends in failure
but maybe that's the point;
they return empty-handed
because the trout don't belong to them

but maybe that's the point
that nothing belongs to us
because the trout don't belong to them.
We are intertwined, not owners;

nothing belongs to us,
not even the ghosts of speckled trout.
We are intertwined, not owners.
We're just translucent white wisps.

One for the River Rats

for Blake

You steer the barges,
one tattooed hand resting

on the paint-chipped, once-white rail,
the other in control of a ship

bringing shipments of goods
back from Cairo, Kentucky

up the Mississippi shipped
from Panama or China or countries

we greedy Americans can't pin-
point on a map. These goods

we are told are for the greater good,
to ease our troubled lives. Meanwhile

you ease out of your driveway
every three weeks, wave

goodbye in the morning
darkness to only your wife

because the kids are still
sleeping & you don't want to wake

them before shipping off
again, so you steer your truck,

one tattooed hand on the coal-black wheel.

Leg/Ear

When the doe arrives
tethered to beat-up
pick-up bed or rachet-
strapped to roof rack,

because she lacks
a rack, we'd ask
if we should attach
the tag through her

ear's copper softness
or where the thick thigh
muscle hugs her
downy tail. Our buck

knife sliced a slit no
wider than her eyelid,
just enough to slip
the red plastic

strip through, feed
it back into itself,
ouroboros marking

his territory. A glowing
grandpa once told me
I had no choice. She was
his grandson's first, her

ears dangling sinew; *at least*,
he sputtered, *at least that boy*
didn't waste any meat.

After the Ice Storm

Reenter the woods. Scout
out tinder & kindling. You must

toss the sodden timber back,
but be careful: If you peel

back the bark, you might detect
that moisture doesn't always saturate

the core & you might cast out
a scrap worth keeping.

Learn to snap twigs
between knees & crack

larger limbs over your thick
right thigh bone. You must

cull from felled branches.
Green's no good; it needs
aged so it can know its purpose.

Exercise

It seems trite that I ask
my students to draw their favorite flowers
when the ridgeline behind my acquaintance is turning to ash

& the streets of Gaza are being bombarded,
bodies scattering like sunflower seeds on the wind
that one student drew & we know

that some bodies like some seeds are destroyed where they lie
but at least the flights of seeds serve
to nourish. Yes, it seems blasphemous for these bodies to be

sketching peonies & poppies when the red of poppy leaves
is being shed in Congo's cobalt mines
by bodies younger than my students.

But in this room, we settle in relative safety, channeling
our inner Monets, sketching pistils & stamens
& petals, paying particular attention to their textures.

This exercise might seem meaningless
when the world is burning & men are murdering
women & the tragedies like bodies keep stacking

& stacking to the ceilings
as these attacks on people & land & planet
seem to be unceasing. Yet my hope in having

these students draw flowers
is that when they see beauty & value in the ugliest of places
that they can enact change, spring up

like defiant dandelions insisting on their presence
alongside a trestle's track.