

Two Poems

by Tim DeJong

At a Rural Valero

We stopped for gas in north Mississippi,
the station a strip of asphalt
encompassed by dense undeveloped land.
Refilling, I was myself filled by the sense
of something gathering around us,
the air carrying the wet scent of night
and the locusts' metronomic hum.
There had been a forest fire, the nearby
trees charred spokes of ash
clustered together like dark stalagmites
expectorated from the soil.
The sun had fallen behind a ridge;
fireflies winked in the intervening gloom
like stray ellipses decorating
an unfinished thought.
Mine, then, was that even
in its ugliness, the world is so beautiful
that we are inveterate materialists,
clinging to this life, its ruddy heft,
its casual abundance. The tank full,
I paused, feeling suddenly
as though barely in my body, attuned
for an instant to the truth
of what we finally become.
Then some shout or laugh dispelled it.
You'd returned from the convenience store,
bearing supplies for our mutual journey:
for me, Gatorade, and for you, gum.

Invisible Rift

In the South at Christmastime
the dead grass is leached
and stiff, drained
to the color we name "colorless"—
color of the ground
all through that brown
and sunlit Southern winter
not long after we met.
Wearing neon orange vests
so as not to be mistaken
for deer and summarily shot,
we traipsed down
toward the creek,
wandering the woods together
before we really knew each other.
I suppose I can say,
now, that I do know you,
but discover every day
the word's limits: a way
to soften, at best, the blunt
edges of being inside
another's life. Arriving
at the rocky creek we watched
as a hawk on the far
shore eyed us with imperious
unblinking scorn.
The frayed tether between
its consciousness and ours
hinted at the rupture
all living requires,
the ways we are torn
between self and world
from the moment we're born,
and as constantly breach
that divide to find what
might mend us—the tenuous bond
separation inspires.

