Segue

online literary journal

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Rieske
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Segue is published once a year in August. We accept submissions of high quality fiction, poetry, and creative nonfiction between January 1 and April 30 (closed May through December), and writing about writing year-round via email. Before submitting, please read past issues to understand the sort of work we publish, then read our submission guidelines.

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Interstellar Travel

What we wanted to believe was the alien landscape,
a sort of cratered Lego creation
we could affix ourselves to, holes in our shoes
stuck with gravity to the dimpled highway,
until we unblock our eyes and return
to the wet streets we know by name,
the grids and dividers,
the concrete walls and our bodies
perpendicular, and these finite street lights
that allow us to forget
what night feels like and turns unfinished blacktop

into a mirror image. Trees suddenly point like arrows
into the street, and our surprised expressions
wobble behind headlights
and windshield wipers, pebbled
and indiscreet. Any moment we expect
to crane our necks and no longer recognize
the simplest of constellations, expect stars
to fall like quarters or nickels into our hands,
where we could finger the light. Still, the moon doesn't blink
and seems to have a nose, fuzzy like an ashtray, which reminds me.
Ground Survey

Most nights, I pretend I'm the passenger
in this scenario. I never steer, or make
a decision. The only capable part would be
my teeth, as my eyes close against halos
of light, vapor-like streaks bouncing
off the rear-view mirror, disassembling
the night. And then I believe memory
is more accurate than a map or diagram. Routine
prayers and ways of pleading will unclick from my mouth
as the unassuming landmarks become quarantined

question marks. The tourism department tells us to wait
for three a.m. Something terrible will happen, I'm sure.
The story will start again, the fast-forward button
will dissolve into nothing under my hand, and this momentum
will stop, paused on peculiar faces tipped upward, mouths slack
and without. My body will start to suspect underground motion,
feral and toothy, but gleaming with such brilliant memorabilia, such
substantial movement, each cellular structure turning to crude oil.
Author Notes

Tegan Echo Rieske lives in a moldy house in Indianapolis, Indiana, and spends most days, lately, procrastinating on her thesis. Her poetry has previously appeared in nidus, The Southeast Review, and Eclipse.

About the Work

The two poems here are part of a larger series I've been working on for a long time, almost eight years. My brother died before his 30th birthday, I lost my mind, and these poems are about that process—which doesn't just involve losing my sense of the world, but finding a different orientation. I'm really very obsessed with how humans perceive themselves on Earth, how we can so easily miss out on the billions of years that led to this particular organization. I have this impression that a lot of humans feel like hitchhikers on Earth, like we're just waiting around for the end so we can get out of these bodies already and get on with the jam in heaven or the afterlife or whatever, or maybe just be perfect energy instead of so fragile and animal and diseased. These poems are in some respects about how strange the artifice of all this is, our packaged cigarettes and our interstates and constant light pollution and the way we complain about everything, etc. I can imagine human evolution began with a complaint.

In some ways I have a terrible time writing poetry. What I like about the genre is that it provides a way to express something beyond language through words. Like music, it's the space between, the silence, which gives shape and meaning. Nevertheless, I'm really nitpicky with my word choices and line breaks. Obsessive, almost. What I strive for is good music and imagery and an overall sense of experience, but I know I can never be a good judge of my own work. I imagine poems like little rollercoasters or funhouses. I don't always need to make sense of a poem, as long as I can sense something happening, that underground movement.

The two poems here felt a bit more effortless than some of my other work, which isn't to say they haven't been through the most awful amount of revision. What I mean is that I had a clear feeling about the poems, that I wanted to express something about sense of alienation and finitude, about wanting to feel grounded in the world but afraid of what that might mean. It's not just about losing religion, but questioning this whole construct of humanity. That's something I constantly try to do in my poetry, interrogate what's been built up around us.

The link I've provided is another in the series, for those who may be interested.

Tegan Echo Rieske on the Web

[www.pitt.edu/~nidus/archives/spring2003/toc.html]