

Jeffrey Alfier

Signs of Grace at Hotel San Gil

city center, Sevilla

I. Daybreak

On the patio, Balkan students slump
in plastic chairs. Traveling cheap, they reek
of wine, canned meat, pilfered cigarettes —
their clothes a mélange of charity shops.
A young woman with disheveled
hair, thin as rickets, ambles over to them
with her sleep-dumb eyes, her face the warmth
of some beautiful hurt. I envy them,
all their laughter and complacent ecstasy.

II. Nightfall

Rough words from a room down the hall —
a woman scolds a man as if he were a child.
One floor below, quick footsteps thud, like baggage
lobbed into airline cargo decks. The sounds
are balanced by soft talk that leaks over a balcony
across the street. From a low rooftop,
strung laundry takes the sound of fluttering sails.
Streetlights and a soft breeze throw twisted
shapes, like smoke, against my window.

Walking the Abandoned Rail Bridge Over Yellowstone River

The law says I can't trespass
this defunct bridge. But the sheriff
ignores me, knows I always share
with him my trout catch and whiskey,
knows I like to get home
by sundown to my shack
off Convict Grade Road.

Below, icy waves of green current
run storm-swollen and fast,
like a rain-washed autumn
come early.

I reach home, unlatch the screen
door, slide my hand along the wall
for the light switch's solid
touch. The room's a soft glow
now, like the hope
of tomorrow's catch
glimmering in a shot glass.

Triptych for Terminal Island Docks

I.

The way the late sun arcs through a window at Harbor Light
Café to brighten a page from Bukowski or Levine might gather
the trades of beleaguered workers the way they appear
in want ads — machinist, welder, cook, driver — ads
begrudged and curt: we'll hire if we absolutely must.

II.

The café reader will have his fries and catfish,
eat with the indifferent gaze of the sea. He'll stuff the book
into a thigh pocket, feel the poet's lines press against his leg.
They insist laments into every task, every tuna bin he hauls
ashore, every forklift he mounts, each joint and muscle
falling behind his body's stiff schedule.

III.

Let the tuna, worn trawlers, and sea lions that ease themselves
onto abandoned pilings feel the light unfold around them,
sorting each from giant shadows of cranes and container ships.
Let everything take its chances here through the light
that rides the harbor, the vague fortunes of berths and slips,
the reborn barge at Larson's boat repair, released to tunes
of milling machines and drill presses as it backs its way seaward,
the dead tired soul who stumbles through his shift on burnt
coffee and luck, all those laments that would catch him as he falls.

Jeffrey Alfier won the 2014 Kithara Book Prize for his poetry collection, *Idyll for a Vanishing River* (2013). His latest publication is *The Red Stag at Carrbridge*, a collection of Scotland poems (forthcoming, 2016). Recent publication credits include *Southern Poetry Review*, *Hotel Amerika* and *Permafrost*.