

CLAIRE KEYES POETRY AWARD WINNER

Mark Wagenaar

TEXAS BLUES

And God said, *let there be tinder*
& an August Texas was sparked from flint & stone,
dry as a hog's tongue
two weeks dead, sunstruck thistle & thorn-starred deadfall underfoot
a mist half-inch above every field, empty spillway a snakeskin
curling through town,
empty as God's throat.
If this were Purgatory, forget it, we'd all quit
& climb back down the mountain.

But this may have been the hour impressionism or baby CPR
was discovered, the hour our names were written in water,
a Venetian serif,
by the lead letters sunk in the Thames a hundred years ago,
but in this hour we'll settle
for a hawk moth circling the orange trumpet vine bloom,
the five-foot scrub on the fenceline weeping
fat drops of oil from its leaves,
& the 9:07 moaning north, late as a prayer
for yesterday's condemned.
We'll settle for a bobblehead baby who flails around like a spider monkey
at bedtime—this week of her first tears—
& will only soothe when she's picked up—

it's weightlessness that tunes us to the wind,
the out-of-body that calms the body

like song. And for song we've a toilet that howls like a kettle after
the flush. Maybe we'll never hear the mermaids singing

but listen, the gators of Lake Lewisville are whistling
right up through the pipes, over the echoes

of the train horn, last bell, last call in a few hours,
hearts wrapped in the shuddering shroud

they're made of.

It's in falling we feel it keenest, freefall
of tears or oil droplets, vowels in our names

on the tongues of the coyotes calling

in the distance, an eye on the life

in our hands, an eye on the UV index & stubborn temp,

on a train we've never seen,

on the glint of sickle moon, knuckle

of one of the hands bearing the dark litter westward.