

Three Poems

Caius Buran

Runner-up, Thomas McGrath Award for Poetry

Body, Floating

It was an easy thing to accept when
suspended.

Above, through ten feet of heavy, were
chlorine, sweat, and sunscreen.

Below nearly three more impassable fathoms:
white cement stretching out,
a blank slate.

My eyes didn't even burn. My lungs didn't even hurt.
It was easy to breathe.

Drowning educated a prior
suspension.

Above, through layered organs, were
iron, tears, and antiseptic.

Below inches of flexing muscle:
white sheet stretching out,

a blank slate.

I only started choking
when dragged to the surface.

Body, Beautiful

I remember the waxen faces of my three
classmates at their wake, coated in
make-up to mask the incomprehensible damage caused by
a man and his F-150.

Their youngest sister couldn't attend,
because she was in critical condition
and survived. I wonder
who kept her company while
they were in heavy, velvet-lined coffins under the
flat, white lights of a church that stunk like flowers.

They say the dead look like they're sleeping, that the techniques of modern

morticians can zhuzh up the battered corpse into something just nearly
breathing.

Three murdered children should
not look like three murdered children.

Three murdered children, bruised and pallid and scarred,
should be undressed by strangers, should have their mouths and eyes
glued shut, should have their blood drained through the jugular, should
be flushed and filled

with embalming fluid in the carotid artery, should have the process repeated

for their internal organs, should be washed by strangers, should be clothed
in their Sunday best by strangers, and should be

placed in heavy, velvet-lined coffins under the
flat, white lights of a church that stinks like flowers

by strangers—

all of this so they can be, soon,

buried over Texas oil

and under Texas sky

by family.

I started sobbing once I ran outside,

jostling my way through other mourners,
twelve years old and blind with sickness,
determined to get to the car. And once I did and
the door slammed and my mom asked if I wanted to go back inside,
I screamed. And after that, I think we drove home.

Body, Playground

In my mother, even now,
seven years post hysterectomy and
twenty-five/eighteen years respectively since we moved out,
my brother and I, we live on.

In me, even now,
eight years since I knew *something* was wrong,
my body carries you.

I wonder where you've settled. Have you
nestled in my heart's walls
to beat along with me? Boisterous hands
slapping against a drum
again again again! Do you wander
watching for the wounds I've borne
and will bear again
so to mend them together? Tender, anxious eyes
overseeing the press of a Band-Aid to a scrape—once secured,
leaning in with the all-important kiss
upon the plastic. Is it fun
to swirl and dance with my blood cells
through veins like tube slides? Up and down and up and down screaming
laughing and blissful in the dizzy rush down and up and down and up
forever my baby forever forever

Caius Buran is a McNair scholar pursuing a bachelor of arts in English with certificates in creative writing and classical studies at the University of North Dakota. He is one of the assistant managing editors for *Floodwall*, the treasurer of UND's chapter for Sigma Tau Delta, and the president of the Adelphi Literary Society. His free time is spent starring on, and creating for, *9mm Retirement Radio*, an actual-play podcast, and doting on his dog, two cats, and ball python.