

The Watchman

by Nicolette Wong

The coffins pile up gnawing dust on the glass panes to the rims of my binoculars. Shadowy cracks of stifling proportions, gliding over my eyes a requiem of mahogany. At dawn they heave between the workers' hands, leave their resting places for a green trail on concrete to the pier. A last ride across the sea before the dead swallow fire.

I'm a free man the instant mercury bursts across the sky.

In an ivory-colored booth I sit with a plastic badge hanging from my neck to the buzz of wrecked meters and slit wires crawling toward my nippy rings. On some nights there are more empty slots than I can count, or the wooden jigsaw multiplies itself to hit the ceiling. None of this matters when I slip out of my uniform.

My wife saw my binoculars once. *The building across the street?* she said, hissing under her breath. *Go cleanse yourself or don't come to bed.*

She doesn't see my fingers on cold metal like I see hers flipping the switch of her plastic love. Alone in our nest she reenacts the crux of flapping legs. Up. Down. Up. Down to the concentric patterns of a black hole reverberating around week-old stains. Does she blow halos above her head or someone else's when I'm not looking?

I can't kill that surround sound through my bones. My halo is burning down this booth. I'm gasping for air where the coffins are floating behind rust. Somebody, breathe with me.

