Manhood

By Siobhan Manrique

The stray dogs, all of them hybrids of bears and rats,
Barked bloody murder at every sound they thought they heard,
Even the trash half-sunken in the sand,
Plastic bags and sun-bleached nothings rustled by the gasoline breeze
Of a dented pickup truck rattling through the neighborhood,
En route to one of the two uninspected drive-thrus in town,
Where a Number 3 or Number 5 with a hot coffee could save
The all-alone driver,
Secondhand drinker with bruised knuckles on the wheel,
Cold toes on the gas pedal, and a paper bag face on nobody’s mind,
And the dry mouth that still tasted
Like the first swear word he ever uttered,
Back before all the people he hated
Were ever even born.
Shinigami in the 1%

By Siobhan Manrique

I. Use by Date

The Shinigami arrived at the appointed hour
To collect the milk’s soul,
Even showed up a few minutes early,
But he went for a swim
In the half-empty jug of one-percent,
Wondering what it tasted like,
This stuff that the humans steal from the cows
Like Prometheus stole light from the gods.
And he thought that maybe the jug was half-full,
That maybe death is a state of mind and nothing more,
Maybe expiration dates are just guidelines,
Lifespans just suggestions,
And almond milk is the answer—
We could set the cows free!

II. X Days Later

He’s starting to smell as he floats,
Dying his black uniform white.
Proscription

By Siobhan Manrique

I.

To remedy my blindness,
They patched my good eye.

To remedy my ignorance,
They told me what to think.

To remedy my curiosity,
They showed me the dead cat.

II.

Remedy: the lukewarm tea that
Pissed medicinal dirt behind my teeth.

Remedy: the chemical fire whose stomach ate everything
And my mother’s house.

Remedy: the white-eyed nobody whose pulse
Was never in his neck.
III.

Remedy, I need you in the gloom of noon,
Need you as I sleep in the ghost-choked night.

Remedy, forget the time I said I didn’t need you,
Painted my face shame-red, and played Hell in the flesh.

Remedy, no one is going to die
Beside you.
Gag

By Siobhan Manrique

What the color black is
To outer space and
What the color black is
To bloodshot nights and
What the color black is
To the little black dress,
That’s what my god is to me.
Suffocation backdrop to the universe,
Suffocation backdrop to the day, and
The thing I put on to look good
When I step out.

Lately I’ve started swallowing
My own lies;
I need that iron
In my blood.
I tell myself
I’m moving on,
Tell myself
There’s no going back down,
There’s no thinking back down.
But I always back down.

I’m better now!
Savor the pills.
Wait for the sign.
Back down.

Now I haunt my flesh,
Only owe my life
To the god of the gag reflex.

*I'm what I've always been.*

My god is
A jealous god;
My God is the color black
In the back of my throat.