

Galileo's Journal: An Excerpt

Oh, the stars in a universe! I plunge
Into your freckles each night,
Tracing my tongue

Over every speckled light
Across your nose—
I go over your bridge

And memorize the shape
Of each peppered pattern
So carefully I could echo them

In ink on my own skin.
Last night, you told me
That your mother died alone in a shack

Fifteen winding miles off Highway 5.
Now, you want to move out of this city
Because its lights coat the sky

Like a cataract, and keep you
From the cradle of the Little Dipper.
I would move to the countryside with you,

Wish on each star, folds of grass holding
Us beneath, both unafraid of your dark,
This map finally finished.

On My Driveway

Ants surround a beetle, its green-then-navy shell
Luminescent: a dying moon. They burrow
Under its wing, propping it up, revealing
Softness. I think I can see its eyes. I think the eyes move
While marching legs carry exposed bits. I think
I will paint my fingernails a beetle's-wing hue, maybe.
I think of Sundays. The mattress always sighs as the men head
Toward the door. My eyes follow.

I Imagine My Brother, Confident

He walks across the football field, sees girls on the bleachers—
The wind blows strands of auburn hair into one's mouth.
His bony hand lurches to his lips to gnaw the nubs of his nails

And rip at his dangling cuticles. He thinks
Of his blotched and bumpy forehead pressing into hers,
Smearing a smudge of sweat and oil across alabaster skin.

But, tonight: he may sneak a sip of Father's whiskey,
Amber color almost matching that hair. He'll uncork it, gag
At the smell, and brace himself for the burn for the prize

Of a man's strong breath. In the morning, he'll check the mirror:
Shadows make a mirage of chest hair, prompting him
To parade to head of the table during breakfast, where he will finally sit.

Butterfly

I drive you down these roads littered
With magnolia leaves, point out street signs
Without looking. Turn off the main road

While still telling a story—I ate here each Friday.
I notice its seats are still sticky and splintered, skim
The menu, eat the only dish I've ever ordered, digest

The fact that my city is an old town. I pay in crisp bills
And get three frosted-green pennies in change. We walk
To the park two blocks down and sit on a mossy bench.

A low-hanging branch droops by your head, so you pluck
A chrysalis from among the dead leaves—muddy brown,
Knobby, split open, empty. A breeze lifts it from your hand,

Blows it back towards downtown. You tease and ask
If I miss it. No—I'm not sad that I lived here,
Or that I left, or that I have nothing I want to save.