

DAVID SALNER

A Shift of Sand and Steel

1. Whistle and Scrap

The whistle, so I should get my ass in gear,
get ready for what's shrieking toward me:
grinders starting up, stone wheels spitting bits of sand.

A litany of scrap: clatter of magnet as it gathers
to its truck-size breast a car wheel, Camry quarter panel,
stainless sink, bent John Deere steering column,

crumpled dishwasher, bundle of rusted rebar, bucket
of roofing nails, screen door, bank
of busted high school lockers, coil

of wire trailing through the scrapyard
like the bald tail of a rat. Trolleying
toward the furnace room, screeching on rails,

this crane and its quiver of junk
drifts then roams, sways into a wide arc
to take the swing out of the load, hovers

above the open hellhole of the furnace,
obeys the index finger twirling down,
down with the load, down

with it, ready, ready—
fist opening—
ungodly crash and molten tramp trash stink.

3. Aladdin Thermos

A tin box sits on a Formica counter in the lunch room
with grimy stickers advertising *STP*, *Skoal Racing*, *Ducks*
Unlimited, and all the union strikes I've been part of.

Inside the box, Chinese leftovers. "Take them for lunch,
Lily won't eat anything but mac and cheese."
I'll wash down the salty beef and broccoli with coffee,

still hot, from an Aladdin thermos that sees me
through daylights, afternoons, and sleepless
graveyards—its steel shell, like my lungs,

pitted by silica, rusted by chlorine gas.

4. A Dream of Quitting Time

From break to break, I'll wish my shift away,
shower off sand, go out into the crystal clear
all-clear of quitting time—midnight in Arizona,

soaring like a nighthawk over Guadalupe,
this town I work in, where Yaqui Indians
have been driven into the corner

of a long-lost nation; sail further
to Apache Junction, home of *Nate's Used Cars*
and GIRLS, GIRLS, GIRLS; to Globe, Morenci,

where copper towns are dying, leaving high-rise dumps
of orange tailings, listless hills of slag;
or down the dried-out Gila River, into a basin

of forgotten lives, where Brandi Riley
says goodbye to Jason Sanchez, a loud kiss,
a silent night in Casa Grande;

or float above a lonesome bird's eye
of saguaros; careen on desert monsoons
almost to the border; to Bisbee, home of the famous

deportation, surrounded by the tufts and brambles
on the otherwise bare-assed Mule Mountains—
I'll float into the desert night beneath a firmament of sand.