

R. Flowers Rivera

SALAH: DULLES AIRPORT

This is about my quiet fascination
With the man hidden behind the check-in desk.
He is bowing toward the wall.
I have to assume east is east.

The prayer rug he uses
Is longer than and has more colors
Than my dress. He is oblivious
To how inappropriate I am.

He kneels then stands,
Then kneels then stands.
His blue and white uniform
Become the waves of the sea.

For less than a second, we lock
Eyes. I am amazed by his beauty,
The meticulous calmness with which he hobbles,
One leg shorter than the other-to duty free.

BACKWATER GAL

My breath
Rushes as I open
Each swollen window, each door
To the will-o'-the-wisp
Thought of his return.

The morning caws
Away the darkness, sez:
Gal, how you become so
Common? A sweeper of floors?
Step, swish-swish. Step

Swish. All day long, the dust
Flies away, then back.
Dandelion spores
Blanket my feet with answers.
Step, swish-swish. Step, swish.

Driver, he was always mighty
Quick with the lash. Known for lightin'
Past stop to go. But who am I to talk?

I lisp my *R*'s. And regardless what I said,
That's all he heard, planted top step,

Inquiring after the lone peach cobbler
Cooling on the rack. I was obliged to
Cut into it before time. Sweet and wet,
Empty, a damp mouth muttering
My earnest desire for him

To get on back to the field.
Step, swish-swish. Step,
Swish. How do I keep conjuring
Nothin' but these mudsill men
And their stick and carrot love?

The broom slips
From my hand, lands
Flat on the kitchen floor. My palm
Aches. Turned up, it exposes
A splinter. Too deep a-bed

To simply pluck free. I take
A straight pin. Fire its length
Till it glows. Then temper
Its heat in two fingers of homebrew,
Knowing what comes next.