

Christine Casson

Of the Night

I hear its soft *clie CLIC clie CLIC* like watch
ticks in reverse on an elevated track
high above the forest floor where I've stopped
to sit and rest, watch the train slowly progress,
clad in an arrangement of ochers and browns,

before I move beneath an old growth tree
like the railcar's crude resource but towering,
glance through its limbs at the lowering sun,
knowing I should leave with hours to town.
Instead, I lean in to investigate its trunk.

It's all hair, or fur of some kind — ash gray,
blonde, shades of umber and slate, burnt chestnut —
a thick, sturdy mane. Above, just the same —
branches, offshoots deftly woven or braided.
Nonplussed, I still worry the overdue hour.

Then home again to my childhood house
and father away for multiple days;
my mother alone but for me; the rooms
in disarray. She goes about her chores,
as I do mine; dusts and straightens the parlor,

the kitchen downstairs. I clean and tidy
my bedroom, then theirs; think about my age.
In the basement electric trains circle,
ceaselessly, along rails strangely singing.
The dolls in the dollhouse prepare for dinner.

I'm sixty. Yes. Is she now ninety-nine? —
And in such splendid health? I recollect day
and the date — thirteen years since her death.
A lone bird calls. The trains chug round their tracks.
Dolls finish their meal in gauzed lunar light.

The bird cries once more. It seems to inquire,
What of the forest? Its wings shadow inwards.
Subcutaneous, I wager, smoothing
the beds. Footsteps in the stairwell — my mother's
soft shuffling. She will join me upstairs.



Zero Is

absence or, if preferred, a world:
perhaps our bulking planet:

continent laden, ocean
heavy, sum total of profound

metaphor; a placeholder
some would say has additive

properties allowing for end-
less accumulation:

from above a mottling of clouds,
land, water, conjuring

billions of years of somethings;
for others, gesturing to

no things — things remaining
undefined that might be matter —

or matter, depending on
point of view and by who

and how! zero is mastered:
in neat formation lining

up like helmets for a drill,
accounting and accounted for;

or amassing — an ample,
riotous crowd of “O’s”

converging and bobbing in
delight, *ahhing* satisfaction

until like bubbles they drift
lazily apart; or — gaping,

a single vacuum, begun
in seed, quiet, furtive

lump that balloons in-
exorably from inside, hole

devouring the whole,
greedy, sated, smug —

