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Holding the Line

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Engel: Holding the Line

HOLDING THE LINE

**JOSEPH
ENGEL**

The rusty train cars are twenty
empty-handed merchants sitting
silent but ready like always;

stubborn in the wind which whips
a lash of brittle howls across this iron
framed picture of sleep, this

ubiquitous breeze, flustered
by forgotten ways of freight, tosses
a bailey hat into its own mouth.

Between the tracks there's a young man
casting dreams of romance in drags
off his cigarette and swigs

from a bottle of whiskey.
He sits in light as thin as mist
on a pile of books

which a drifter sees
with hands like flint,
wide-eyed for warmth.

Though, someone tends
to all these snoring beasts,

with a yawning gait
and a flashlight, for hope,
who knows

every crater on the moon
by name and has taken
to making up constellations.

His wife is the light on at home
who drinks up the wine
and is used to the cold

side of their bed except nights
that her burning arm
finds their dog Orion, her smoke.

Dragging into home burnt and early,
their bedroom door blares open
to his red eyes full of choked out sun,

of thoughts on vagrants
or what might have howled
down between the trains.

He brings the smell
of night and granite and tar
which makes her more awake,

coughs a bit and then
in full eclipse
begins to pull the shades.