

Limey

She is the daughter of the man who has been stealing limes from the Moon, that inveterate hoarder of lusty, duskened citrus, which it keeps as a proof against scurvy that it fears could strike unexpectedly, causing the Moon to pop from the sky, like an orbiting tooth from the galactic gums.

The limes are hidden beneath the softest silt, and must be approached silently, then coaxed from their sub-zero slumber with phosphorescent entreaties and talk of the sea. Only then can the man pack them into Demerara rum-stained barrels before sliding down the first shoots of dayspring to the ground.

She catalogs and then candies the limes to bet in her monthly poker game with our Sun, which has entered its adolescence and constantly threatens to expand and envelope us all in a maelstrom of fire: but then, what more could a parent wish from its child?

The Deficit

As the sun rises, baristas brew our daily nostrums: espresso mixed with espresso, made near solid with sugar: shot after shot to reduce the size of the dark bags beneath commuters' eyes, and as the sun beats down overhead, petered-out prophets chant bedtime stories in front of mattress discount stores. In the evening, deputized bedtime enforcers gently storm homes, issuing citations for end-table clutter and unmade beds.

The last time we paid down the national sleep debt was during the presidency of Calvin Coolidge, a quieter time, when silver certificates were issued alongside sleep certificates, redeemable through any county treasurer for several hours of pure, unadulterated shut-eye. Of course, this was before the national sleep standard was eliminated to make way for the privatized sleep industry—now we grind woozy lavender powders, mixed with melatonin, and chamomile, and whiskey, as we count sheep, then down from 100, as the deficit steadily increases.

The fed raises rates on pillow-plumping, the House expands tax cuts for nap-rooms, while the Senate debates a sleep-trade agreement with our more well-rested allies. Meanwhile, among financial and dream analysts, rumors spread of children plucked from orphanages and put to work in massive sleep mills, where they must play to the point of exhaustion each day, so they can fulfill their nightly sleep quota.