

The Ilanot Review

Table of Contents

Editor's Note

Submissions

Archives

About Earth

Flying into Chicago at Sunset

Annie Marhefka



Image: Frea Wooten

Through the book-sized window, the circling planes blink in the sky like lightning bugs at dusk. The earth below is speckled with baseball diamonds and a grid of twinkling houses with streets painted diagonally. I imagine dollhouse-sized mommies and daddies tucking kiddos into cartoon-printed sheets, stuffed animals under arm crooks. The city dead ends into the abyss of the lake abruptly, a hard line between life/motion/rapidity and solitude/endless space. The moon is barely distinguishable from the lightning bugs, a shiny pulsing orb, shifting slightly along with me.

The Ilanot Review

Table of Contents

Editor's Note

Submissions

Archives

About Earth

The other passengers on the plane are as distant and fleeting as the flickering planes trying to avoid crossing into each other's flight paths: we don't speak to one another, avoid eye contact, avoid elbow rubs on armrests, avoid kicking the seat in front of us. Each of us in our own little orbit, eyes down to the ground or in our books or our phones, headphones in ears to plug the noise around us: a cocoon. I, too, stuff little buds into ears, hold a book in my lap without ever turning a page, close my eyes as if I am napping, anything to keep my seatmate from sparking a conversation because I'm afraid I will blurt out what I am thinking which is: *This is the first time I am flying as a motherless daughter.*

People say they feel closer to their loved ones when they fly; something about the imagery of angels soaring up above clouds probably, but for me it makes the distance between my deceased mother and me feel greater. The slightest bit of turbulence sends the moon skipping erratically out the window, and I am reminded that I don't have a mother at home tracking my flight like the rest of the passengers.

Although, I wonder now, is that a habit of every mother or just mothers like mine? The ones who have lost a child? Does every mother pop open a browser the moment her kid's plane's wheels leave the runway and keep an eye on the tiny blip in her peripheral while she goes about cooking the pasta or watching her favorite reality show? Or is it just the ones who have had knocks on doors in the middle of nights alerting them of an accident, a car overturned, a son being airlifted, an urgency to go, now, try and get to the hospital before he...

When we land at ORD, it is as if I expect the moon to keep moving, swimming through the night sky. Stepping forward on a forward-moving walkway, I float through space and time and people whiz by unnaturally, too eagerly, too in a hurry. Though in motion, I feel as stationary as the moon with its lightning bug companions circling 'round.

I am somewhere between Concourses B and C and the only thing that grounds me is looking up. Above me is a dizzying array of long, irregular bulbs, neon twists of light with more steadiness than the swarms of bodies dimly lit by cell phones whirring by. The lambent glow of the squiggling bulbs radiates off the tops of heads, baseball caps and balding crowns and the women with soft, bouncing curls. Blues and violets and greens

The Ilanot Review

Table of Contents

Editor's Note

Submissions

Archives

About Earth

blur together, a brilliant and blinding mesh of color that gives off the illusion that the immobile lights are flickering.

As I stumble off the end of the moving walkway, I need to pause for a moment, reorient my body to the stillness of standing but I don't; I keep going, crossing the carpet way and stepping onto the next moving walkway. I must stay in motion, keep moving to the next tunnel of swirling neon lights, moving further away from her death date, moving closer towards her.



Annie Marhefka is a writer in Baltimore, Maryland, where she spends her time writing, boating on the Chesapeake Bay, and hiking with her kiddos. Her creative nonfiction and poetry have been featured in *Sledgehammer Lit*, *Anti-Heroine Chic*, *Coffee + Crumbs*, and *Capsule Stories*, among others. Annie is working on a memoir about mother/daughter relationships. You can find Annie's writing on Instagram @anniemarhefka, Twitter @charmcityannie, and at anniemarhefka.com.

Image: "Luna Moth" by Freya Wooten

Back to Table of Contents

Back ← ◇ → **Next**
