

Death & Dying Along I-15

Asher Blakely

We chug along the middle lane. Trapped
inside the quiet of a broken radio. He stretches,
carefully, foot scraping through cans littering the floor
that I'd meant to clean them before leaving.
His leg aches all the time now, nerve damage

from a domestic violence incident with his late-father.
The doctors say PT should help, but it doesn't.
So he aches, mostly in silence, because his family
prize that kind of tongue-biting. They believe
if you can't see it, it isn't real
if you ignore a thing, it never happened
if you pretend everything is okay, it is fine

even, or especially, when that silence could kill you.
The road slows to a crawl though it's barely noon.
No AC, so we crack the windows, letting in the stink of baked
pavement and diesel along with the dry breeze.

I turn, briefly, to see his grimacing face. He hates
the long drive. He plucks the sticky fabric
against his chest, and I too feel as though
I am swimming in my own sweat.

"I'm sorry," I say. "Thanks again for coming with me."
His hand touches my shoulder. I can hear his smile
when he says he was happy to do it. He misses the days
before his body betrayed him. When he could drive himself.
We talk of the places he used to go and the hikes he used to take.

We talk about the failure of relationships and the fuzzy boundaries
of our own. We were friends for years before last summer
when my husband got them both shit-faced and naked
before we tumbled laughing into bed.

We talk about his cats. The Athena and Coun that went missing last year
Who he still looks for in every shadow. Set who died in the winter
whose body he kept in a bag in the freezer until the ground grew soft.
TV and Artemis who he cremated and buried beneath his favorite tree,
up the hill at the back of the property his mother
means to sell sometime this year.

He says, "when my time comes,

I want to be cremated and laid
to rest alongside my babies.”

I am filled with words I cannot say,
so I reach for him. Tangling our fingers
as the silence stretches between us.

Intervention, but we don't call it by it's name
Asher Blakely

We call it, I'm worried about you
It's been three days since I saw you
Eat more than a handful of cashews

We call it, you haven't returned
My several phone calls and I don't
Know if you're even alive out there

We call it, you're cocooned
in your nest of blankets
And I miss the shape of your face

We call it, famine
Or feast-- you've squirreled
Away your money and can no longer live

We call it, binge
And purge-- I am so tired
Of always holding your fragility

We call it, I cannot control
You like this, and it makes us
Both more than a little uncomfortable

We call it, you used to hurt
Me but the wound is still
weeping and that may never change

We call it, tough love
And you've done nothing
To staunch the bleeding

We call it, you stabbed
Me in the back, but we're pretending
To smile for the cameras anyway

We call it, moving
On because standing
In this hurt isn't progress

We call it, I forgive
You for breaking me open and
Rearranging the beating heart of me

Asher Blakely (he/they) is a polyamorous, trans masculine person living in Utah with his husband of 16 years and their two amazing teenage children. Asher is a confessional style poet, who uses poetry to explore the demons of his past life in the hopes that his words will help others facing the same traumas to not feel so alone. Asher is a self-professed smut addict and reads gay romances to unwind and keep sane.