



## Rail

**Kai Carlson-Wee**

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Long stretches of hunger, sleep deprivation, filth, fear-filled nights under bridges, and the accompanying existential questions will leave a mark on a man, and his poetry. Kai Carlson-Wee lays it out there in this shy, wistful, forthright collection, and the mark is now winningly shared with the reader. A former Wallace Stegner Fellow with an MFA from Wisconsin-Madison, his work has appeared in *Ploughshares*, *Gulf Coast*, *Best New Poets*, *TriQuarterly*, and elsewhere.

### *Posers*

*Outside the bookstore in downtown Seattle  
we huddle away from the rain. Two days  
out of the mountains and looking to hitchhike  
a ride down to Plain. Scrape a few dollars together  
for food. Cars move quietly over the road.  
Rain beats down on the blue plastic awning  
we've jimmy-rigged over our heads. There are  
three of us asking for spare change and handouts.  
Night falling slowly away from the stores.  
The girl named Saturday plays the guitar.  
My brother and I sing softly along, working  
to keep us in key. We look bedraggled and crazy.  
We stagger and weave in the limited range  
of the tarp. I think to myself I am not this  
hungry. I am not this desperate for any  
clean thing. I am only a few more weeks  
on the west coast. Living off food stamps,  
volunteer work at the Bellingham food shelf.  
Squandering yogurt and leftover bread from  
the Trader Joe's dumpster on First. I say I am  
working to make myself better. Learning  
the rhythm and speed of my heart. The same  
three chords and the harmony failing. Nodding  
along to the sound of my brother's voice.  
Trying out the words in my own mouth until  
I am finally able to sing.*

MATT SUTHERLAND (May/June 2018)

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