

Nick Vagnoni

A Publix in Hollywood

for David Svenson

I bought canned hearts of palm, a jar of purple Peruvian olives,
and a little can of tuna from Spain
that would slice my knuckle and bleed it into my sink;
I saw a tired family with hospital visitor stickers on their shirts,
and in the cut fruit cooler,
between wedges of pineapple and tubs of chunked fruit,
a four-pack of Natural Light tallboys,
with one gone missing from its plastic snare.

Did you see who stole that air-conditioned beer?
Who found the least fetid steak?
Were you there to sympathize with the armed security guard?
Did you see the young couple arguing in line,
him waving her off as she stormed away,
her coming back to ask if he needed help carrying their bag of charcoal?

And did you see, on the way out,
across from the scale, the Western Union forms,
and the copy machine destroyed by the desperate scanning
of so many photo IDs and passports and water bills,
perched on the coin counting machine, tall as that missing can of beer,
a candle
for the sacred heart
unlit then, but already burned to its base,
and on it the words
have mercy on us...
glowing furnace of charity...
have mercy...

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Nick Vagnoni teaches undergraduate writing courses at Florida International University, where he received his MFA in creative writing. He was born and raised in Key West, and he studied at New College of Florida prior to moving to Miami. Last year, he began teaching poetry classes in local prisons via a partnership between Exchange for Change and O, Miami.