



Litany

for Silver Nitrate Saints

Lee Potts

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The camera has two purposes: one is to help the person holding it to see. The other, simply to draw light into itself.

— Kate Greenstreet (from “56 Days” in *The Last 4 Things*)



/ we don't always use the same light /
sometimes we trap weary light from the sun
/ sometimes we make new light / just for
the occasion / infant light / found light /
light needing to be preserved / all combined
/ all squeezed through a perfectly formed
cleft / and taken away from the world /

*Everything resting latent and unseen.
Everything ruined by careless light.*



/ each camera carries secrets / each holds
everything given / but keeps it secret / like
a body in a grave / the same close dark /
the same waiting / changes you cannot
know / a grave waiting for light to break in
/ for a thief / for an angel /

*Everything resting latent and unseen.
Everything ruined by careless light.*



/ every camera is porous in just the right
way / defined by the light it doesn't allow
in / or all the stray light it left to the world

*Everything resting latent and unseen.
Everything ruined by careless light.*



/ the strip of silver salts / wound within each
camera / waits like any saint in a cell / for
radiance to break in / an instant / focused /
then waits again / and waits /

*Everything resting latent and unseen.
Everything ruined by careless light.*



beyond any sorting/ every box of photos is
a box of mournings / full of those who
have since died / places that no longer
exist / possessions long lost / a holiday you
weren't there for / holidays before you
were born / homes that have passed into
another family's hands / how many have
wept / over memories moored / to one of
these boxes / because a shutter once
snapped opened /

*Everything resting latent and unseen.
Everything ruined by careless light.*



/ trying to remember who that is / what
they did / who they hurt / secrets accrete
around photographs / as soon as their
moment / begins to recede / only a growing
silence is to be expected / there's an
alchemy in forgetting /

*Everything resting latent and unseen.
Everything ruined by careless light.*



/ the camera stands in / for everyone who
will ever look at the image / ancestors
smile at those they will never know / those
they can't even accurately imagine / a
photo only knows the past / all else is
added / by each of us who looks at it /

*Everything resting latent and unseen.
Everything ruined by careless light.*



/ what was left out of the frame / now
never to be known / what a wonderful a
gift to be given / permission to imagine
whatever we want /

*Everything resting latent and unseen.
Everything ruined by careless light.*



/ saints of silver nitrate / bless us through a
photograph's patience / inherent stasis /
exposing more than anything else / the
brutality of all those hours / and by
removing motion's relentless distraction /
we can finally know what time has left us /

*Everything resting latent and unseen.
Everything ruined by careless light.*

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Lee Potts is a poet with work in journals including *Rust + Moth*, *Whale Road Review*, *UCity Review*, *Parentheses Journal*, *Ghost City Review*, and *Sugar House Review*. He is poetry editor at *Barren Magazine*. His first chapbook, *And Drought Will Follow*, was released by Frosted Fire Press in April 2021. He lives just outside of Philadelphia.

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