Where the Tiny Things Are: Feathered Essays

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Microbags

At Fry’s Grocery and Drugstore, the plastic bags are tinted brown. Thin enough to see through, they should be strong enough to hold at least three items. But the clerks at Fry’s dig their hands into the abundance of bags. Stacked like money, peeled like sawbucks, a bag wraps a carton of eggs. Another, a half-gallon of orange juice. Another, a pound of butter. Another, a quart of milk. A loaf of bread. You know the song. Each bag makes each item precious. How can I eat this butter now? I should preserve it in a cabinet of wonder but by the time I get home the cabinet of wonders becomes merely a refrigerator. The loaf of bread. The quart of milk. Each item reshelved in the icebox of my future—I now can make béchamel, French Toast, crème Anglaise, Pasta Carbonara, countries of recipes, thanks to bags of permanence and transportation.

The bags, emptied, do not realign. I cannot stack them. They do not fit in my billfold. I bunch them up. I crush them into the reusable canvas bags that I sometimes remember to take to the store. The bags live in the garage. Unlike the refrigerator, the garage is not airtight. Sometimes, I leave the garage door open. Sometimes, there is a wind. Sometimes the wind comes in and steals the plastic bags as if the wind had some groceries to make precious. The wind takes the bags, plasters them against Ponderosa, wraps them around pinecone, flags them against a decaying stick. The stick isn’t going anywhere now. The Ponderosas
preserved. The pinecones, seeding inside of the bag, with the benefit of a
dusty rain, grow their own tree inside the bag. Inside the bag is a perfect
microcosm. A hundred million tiny planets floating across the state,
blowing their forevers across the highway, through the forests, across the
ocean, establishing themselves as normal as continental cash.