

### Poem Beginning with a Line by Sean O'Brien

*What are cities made of? Steam vents. Blue Light. Murder.*  
Grease that boils over the edges. Wires to slash  
the air, cordon off everything like tape at a crime scene.  
Borders that are not to be crossed. Gunfire.  
Elevators dragging their cargo, like an offering,  
into the sky. And everywhere, the rushes and shouts  
of people. Then what, you ask,  
are these people made of? Sustained howls.  
Bones welded together and nerves that rip  
through the body with their pulses and flares  
and kernels of electricity. A Gordian knot  
of muscle and tendons. Stomachs  
that, even now, are pooling with acids, dismantling  
what the body has been fed. Yes, you say,  
and what else are they made of? Hair.  
Marrow. Love poems, half-remembered  
or yet to be written. Cells that map  
the dark of the blood like cartographers  
in a new world. And inside these cells?  
Proteins. Strands of fiber. Identity theft  
and genetic coding. Racial questions and chromosomes.  
DNA, whose spiral shape, some would say,  
resembles a staircase. There is no staircase.  
The spiral is the hard promise of a drill bit,  
a tooth that eats perfect holes into a plank of timber  
which will be fitted into or against another plank.  
Already, the shape has begun to look like a house.  
Now a village. Now a city. Steam vents.  
Blue light. Trouble. Here we are. Metropolis.