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ELLEN WEHLE

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*For my husband,
who gave the possible life*

Given Happiness Like Water

Who wouldn't be the reed basket, rain-hollowed stone?
Always borne aloft in other arms
God knows we are only half-human
That truth is a spiral staircase
Why should we grieve
Windrows of tasseled corn flowing past the road
Like the wake of an ocean liner
Astronomers track the star's signal backward to time's
Source, its cloud of dust and gas like the wake
Of an ocean liner, windrows of tasseled corn flowing
My darling why should we grieve
That truth is a spiral staircase
God knows we are only half-human
Always borne aloft in other arms
Who wouldn't be the reed basket, rain-hollowed stone?

The Song of 10

From the Romans' *decem* our decibels and decimal
system, O tenfold the sorrows of Israel, Decameron

tales told over ten days in December, solstice month
frozen in moondrifts of snow. Our fingers and toes.

Kingly ten-point stags ruling Europe's greenwoods,
for miners a measure in tons of coal or type of tallow

candle weighted ten per pound, the legion poor sewing
by its glow. What else is there to say? Higher than nine.

A number whose power is great to multiply, comprising
one and nil, wand and egg, spindle and heavenly wheel

of goddess Fate who turns time and tides; or what our
parents say summer evenings, hearing our voices dart

and flicker in neighboring yards before we dance from
them into darkness and the world ends, *I'll count to ten.*

Saturday Morning

Once when I was a child I ate a wand of the Hansens' forsythia.

Why? A frenzy of lust—March skies, forsythia blowing like spray
off a fountain.

How I wrestled with that bush. Wood fresh and full of sap, I can't
say it was easy.

Is it Piaget who speaks of differentiation, knowing you are *this*
because you are not *that*?

Honey-scented it lay across my palm. It was not me.

A lifetime ago and still I taste that betrayal. Goddamn forsythia
bitter as radishes, as cellar dirt. The Hansens staring from
their breakfast table.

Yellow fire dripping off my tongue.

How to Get Struck by Lightning

Court destruction. Barometer plunging,
keep tapping the glass. Anger the gods,

make absurd claims, *My works shall*
live forever. Throw open windows, smash

the willow china. Know treetops shake
in ecstatic fits. At sky's first electric tongue-

flick, transformation enters the story:
Medusa-like your hair will lift, veins fizz.

Relax, it's normal. Calculate odds,
place your stake—yourself—laughing

on the shingled rooftop, a steeple. Ignite.

Gravity

People don't jump off bridges because they want to die. Perched on the swaying cables, we have never loved life more. Clinging, hands gone dumb, the pigeon shit, the strata of molted feathers. Exultation: two dark wings, a door.

★

When I was sixteen the Blue Route hung unfinished in the sky, phantom sections of highway that would connect Philadelphia to Allentown. No reason. We'd park and scale the cliff up to girders: me, the boy who loved me. A single catwalk strung over the valley. Edging out. Stars hot as spilled rocket fuel.

★

I look for it still. Body bowing out from the iron struts, gravity a key dropped from my lap. Then . . . slowly . . . the letting go. Right strut. Left. His hand between my shoulder blades; my life locked in his fist. Far below, a rumble of wheels, the magnificat of freight trucks passing.

Absolute Zero

Matter's lowest attainable point; electrons stop circling.

Four a.m. Awake again.

Tenth grade, that guy at the 63rd Street terminal. *Hey girl, wanna get high?* Voice dipping. *Wanna fuck?*

Zen concept of relation: energy transferred through the collision of individuals.

Of course I kept on walking.

We are given this weapon of ourselves: our napes, the small of our backs. *Yesss* rising from my solar plexus.

And the soul? A blackboard of equations.

Certain words, he once told me, *carry enough current to light up entire cities.*

Tonight's droning faucet.

Fuck . . . fuck . . . f . . .

Key Hidden In Case of Emergency

Secret forgotten I circumnavigate our house

★

Always the trellis, ornamental, refusing human weight

★

Train that bore me here long since gone

★

Moon keeps her counsel on whatever gleams, jewel-like,
Cut to fit my palm

★

Abracadabra I say but the eyelid only flutters

★

First this latch, then that