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## Elegy with Two Lemons

Mark Wagenaar

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## Wagenaar: Elegy with Two Lemons

### ELEGY WITH TWO LEMONS

Mark Wagenaar

—after *Still Life with Two Lemons* (Dali)

Neither the book of moonlight nor  
*Death for Dummies* has yet been written,  
so we must turn to Machado again—

to make sense of this sudden absence,  
to suffer the innumerable ceremonies  
of loss, the grief that courses like ichor

through our limbs—*Walker, there are  
no paths, there is only the path you  
make by walking.* There are no new

trails for us, though—we begin & end  
in the kitchen, beside a table with two lemons  
that light the room ceiling to floor.



The lemons are two pieces of coral  
plucked by a seagull from a nameless  
sea. They are the fossils of butterflies

snagged by a collector who turned mute  
when he pulled them from his ragged net.  
Sliced up, they lie like the chariot wheels

of a defeated general, the wafers pellucid  
as the stained glass windows  
in St. Basil's Cathedral, that allow

the light to shine alike on penitents  
& saints. On the table they are as silent  
& eloquent as the bulbs of a rare tulip—buried

a hundred years & a day before they flower—  
as the crumpled sketches of one who tried  
every day to sketch loss as best he could.

Their bitterness is watertight, they hold it in  
past the first cut—one extra moment—  
until the blade presses a little deeper.



Poverty is the fear of loss—but neither  
the lock of hair nor the blood on the lintel  
will forever throw the dark angel

off our scent. I'd as soon consult the chicken  
entrails in the garbage or beg the weather vane  
for prophecies as the tea leaves scattered

across the stove, or the cards on the counter.  
Why not scatter that deck—let the hanged man  
stare. We've moved like strangers pushing

stones—each with our own sets of hours  
& keys—for too long. Pick the picture  
frames up off their faces. Our prayers

may return in bottles, the dice of drowned men's  
bones remain a riddle, & hope may be faint  
as the light of a bitter fruit, but tonight,

in this kitchen, on the far side of a table  
set for three, it's enough to glimpse the pale  
hair about your face, to find you with my hands.