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## Spill

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## Henderson: Spill

### SPILL

### CHELSEA HENDERSON

Here. You once read that it is always an accident  
that saves us. This half-desert, half-mountain city  
sips and unbuttons and shouts around you,  
buildings tined against the glimpse of dusk, heat still swollen  
in near-visible nebulas. An accident, like the chipped  
yellow coffee mug you're unwrapping from last week's  
*Times*, not sure how it wound up in the box  
of kitchenware, not yours. You're a thousand miles  
from anyone who might have put their lips  
to the champagne flute in your hand right now,  
who might have sliced an avocado for the plate  
on the table, cracked an egg into the bowl.  
This city, so extravagant it has a sky, where things  
sing without answers, and sometimes break.  
Every day you wake to the thought of her smallness  
in the mornings, her hair in rain, her habit  
of being new and lovely. And so startling  
its webwork of streets and avenues, a city with buses  
that barrel through their routes, fully lit and empty,  
around corners and up hills at night, a loneliness  
so absolute you nearly crave it. Each day you realize  
all the people who are not her. A knock sounds  
at your neighbor's door, a child's quick feet  
racing to see, and the cellist begins downstairs.  
Here comes beauty, with all its demands and rigors,  
you think, recalling how all twenty-two thousand builders

of the Taj Mahal had to have their thumbs cut off upon its completion, to ensure they'd never again accomplish such a feat, never duplicate its magnificence. Did they know that would be required, you've always wondered, and would it even have mattered? A meager wind tries the bare windows, unraveling like silk from this sky, with its patchwork of stars you can't see in daylight, one of its many disappointments. A floor below, the cello sounds out scales and arpeggios, a lesson in the basics, the architecture of everything great and remembered. The dutiful ascending and descending, the skipping up and up, the inevitable last hollowed note. Her comb. You should probably pick up the phone and apologize for taking it, one of the many non-accidents, one more thing that won't save you. And here you are, standing in a half-unpacked apartment holding an empty champagne flute, an accidental toast to coming here entirely on purpose.