

# AFTER LOSS, A CERTAIN TRAIN

ISAAC  
PRESSNELL

I.

In West Virginia, she wrote to you: *in the bath,*  
*I pressed the showerhead against myself and conjured*  
*your mouth.* A year later, your final intercourse:  
her sad last ditch to turn the halt of the first numeral  
into a zero's gasp. You decided love is a binary switch,  
math and order same as gravity, which tucks the continents in.  
You conceded this fact like you conceded, at twelve,  
to see a therapist when your mother's look was like  
the crack of her voice the morning your father  
packed and left, swallowed in the predawn blue.

II.

Last Christmas, at church with family,  
you finally saw how God is love  
as you imagined the faces of the worshippers  
stripped away, the chemical slurry  
active in their brains as they experienced  
their Jesus the same as you experienced  
her. What is love but the Holy Ghost  
of Instinct, which plays dress-up  
in the abstract husks of the intellect?

III.

You make a new home in Iowa. Evenings  
you walk the bike path, and one night,  
Barn Swallows feeding above the grasses,  
you think beauty, simply put, is that  
which distracts us from death—  
bright coin sinking into the pocket  
of the horizon, how small you feel after  
as you walk the blue-black field,  
or how, post-coitus, your thoughts  
were nothing but a graph of her breath,  
breath that could let you go on living  
as code if it weren't for the condom  
swaddled in tissues. But still,  
this numinous feeling, this electric  
hum that moves from the live-wire branches,  
from the charged cicadas that cover them,  
through the ionic air and into your throat.  
So what to your chapped hands, nerve centers,  
circuit brain. So what to the cold facts  
of your lovemaking. The young  
bull tilts his head to reach the weeds  
beyond the barbed fence. You meet his eye,  
lose yourself, for a moment, in his gaze,  
how he must see you—unreachable planet—  
and how you see him—the humanity you project  
reflecting back from that wet galaxy.