

D. S. Waldman

Virga

I don't make any sense in the high desert. Prayers going out like prayers into a sky too big to answer. Language, as usual, falls short. Every wound a neighborhood with no street signs, every street ending with death in mind. But that's the game. Thin moon and silence. Wind around a cactus. I walk to higher ground, call again my brother's phone and hear, however many times it takes, that the number's been disconnected. I hear over and over, in that pale unwounded voice, the word *twilight*, but know she means *dusk*, but know she means *what does not change / is the will to change*, and walk back down the hill, forgetting why I'd climbed it. Tomorrow I'll drive into the near mountains, hike to where streaks of water and ice trail from clouds, evaporate before reaching the ground. But now it's tomorrow and I didn't go. Drank too much coffee and cried a little. Thumbed through a magazine with captioned diagrams that explained the phenomenon. I lay down for a while and dreamt I saw it. Woke into a dream, a landscape of disputed etymologies, words falling but failing to mediate fully between history and the dryness of my tongue. Page after page, hundreds of them, blank in a book I've been expelled from. I want to say something no one will remember, make a fire in the distance—and walk away.

Polis

I was a shopper in a dark aisle. I was the tone,
dusty and banal, used to address

a grieving mother. The past-tense
of brother. And if you, city unpolluted by light

and sound, unburdened by semantics, wake
into some alternate ending, some casual rearrangement

of buildings and the furniture inside them, then don't
say a word. She'll hear you and walk, over

and over, through the same intersection,
through the turning lane, signaling with her hands

but refusing to turn. So we'll wreath photos in flowers
and leave them on the corner. We'll insist

on a *we* that, given a little distance, years down the line,
we'll realize was actually something cinched

and pre-verbal. A sneeze with no catharsis. A *y'all*
of endless glass, skyward, reflecting others'

reflections of weather: so many layers of brindled gray.
So much potential for rain. They might, after all,

find a need for dark oases. For threat and artlessness.
They might go as far as to build a life around it,

a city populated by memories moving in and out
of view. They might stay a while.

They might name it *Irreducible*, after you.

Variations on a Theme by Stanley Plumly

A person who is not me stands before
their children with nothing in their hands.

The children, with nothing in their hands, look
like a painting of wantlessness, having

learned to want nothing that a painting can
capture. Tears, for example, can sometimes

be captured by the artist—but not the act
of shedding them. Christ, I've heard, did plenty

of tear-shedding. *Jesus wept* is the shortest
and perhaps most understated sentence

in perhaps the longest, most overstated
story. It's lonely, knowing how and when

the story ends, knowing there's a person who
is not you, who will become you. And you, them.