

Jenny Pollak

Afterwards

i

Two boys walk past discussing, as if it were a mathematical problem for which they had the solution, how long a kiss should be—like, five to fifteen seconds, said one of them, with the mouth open.

Winter is over. To walk outside without socks on is to fill a day with meaning. This is Sunday doing its level best to be lovely.

To call a thing by a name other than what I see (rock, tree, cloud—their single syllables I love) is beyond me.

If I speak sometimes in the language of the true believer, if I call on Poseidon, or bow down before Aphrodite, it's probably because I'm hungry.

ii

Look at what the light does to bare branches
she-oaks proffer. An exquisite fretwork of wrought lines drawn over and over
the darkness behind them.

Like whispers in a church.

The way the light was falling on your face one summer
I was terribly in love.

Though there is not much warmth in your smile that I can discern.
And the light (though I only see it now through the distance of more
time) was all my own.

iii

When the butterfly starts out across one kilometre of ocean
you know it's driven by desire and not by fear.

Today the sea is blue and stationary. The fallen trees lie quiet in their roots.
The air makes music in the dead branches of the tree beneath which I am sitting.

If you listen carefully you can hear the beauty in the destruction.
How anything can be called singing if you have an ear for the music.

iv

If this was a film by Kieslowński, then this is the scene where the man says,
“In Kafka, this bus would fly over the fields and no one would get off.” *
I see my life for a moment
between breaths.

How they put the sugar out like an enticement.
The way you catch a mouse.

How once it's caught,
that's it for the little pest.

v

I regret many times never having been beautiful.
The way that beauty is a gift to be given
if only for a little while.

That I had to work at everything.

Now there's no one waits to see me,
as the person whose eyes light up when you enter the room
sees you;

as he or she who waits for you, waits for you
as if you were the one person.

It seems shameful to be saying this.
As if, instead, I should get myself a dog.