

*Will Russo*

## *To a Lover on Vacation*

Because of our apple-sliced planet,  
     it's tomorrow morning in Sydney  
 where, to and from, you'll spend  
     thirty planed hours in limbo, head

caught like floss between headrest  
     and window, buckled in but mindful  
 of helplessness, the body's failures.  
     There are many ways to count time,

I prefer to make it pass. Each time  
     you leave, I clean the bathroom, take  
 to the vacuum. The sponge  
     doesn't waste the faucet's gift, it cries

like most animals. I spray what makes  
     grime vanish, shake out hair the bathmat  
 kept. The mirror won't hold one  
     small thing back. I play dress-up, part my

hair on a new side. Thrust the brush  
     to back pockets of mouth, wisdom holes  
 I prod once daily. The dentist tore gum,  
     cracked molars into chips for the forceps.

I didn't mind the extraction—remedy  
     concerns discomfort, your friend told me  
 of his own jaw and brain where new  
     tumors grew. I wished for remission

of distance, that healing  
wasn't reliant on touch  
when what we do  
is reach. When you call, I listen

for what the phone can't patch: slouch,  
each dimple's gradient, friction of fingernails  
between teeth. I know what it means  
to have what you've hidden found. Still,

I love you still  
in my hands cupped palm to cheek,  
guiding you to my lips, the water  
digits sift on another shore. I haven't

changed the sheets since making my bed  
was the last thing you did before you left.  
I can't smoke in the summer, can't add  
heat to heat, but now afternoons brood

and I'm nearer to sleep. Whiff  
the kitchen: coffee with mildew. Night shower  
soaks, softens skin. Musty towels  
want to dry or be dry. We're mummified,

men swathed from two bruised  
boys. And your friend—weren't we anxious  
for relief, any kind passing? Let your fingers  
graze my back, newly waxed, each pore pink

and opened. I am looking everywhere  
to be filled. I am I am (I am).



## Rain

L.A. bitches swear  
 this never happens. Out  
 the window screen I'm six  
 inches from, each gutter spills  
 a new highway, overture  
 of a city drowned in momentary  
 uselessness. I'm napping.  
 My solid man, the *sweep-flap*  
 of a turned page beneath  
 his slid finger: thunder  
 augmenting cascade's serenade. — Intermission,  
 him lifting my forearm to kiss  
 the lesion a street cactus pricked,  
 having parked too close to its curb.  
 Forgive my lagged body, beloved,  
 marked as a cardboard sleeve:  
 matcha latte with CBD oil. Alas ——— I'm asleep. I'm weary  
 of this branding. Everything I do  
 is expensive. May I please stop  
 doing? The smog pours inaccessible

and this man with his pages  
 flicking like a left-turn signal. Nowadays  
 —maybe it was always so—  
 I need music to stir, to wring the bulwark  
 of stiff joints, the strange movement  
 after holding any position too long.  
 What withdrew?

Was it conscious?  
 Alexa is summoned  
 to wake, and so am I.  
 And that's called clout,

honey. And when she plays a song from  
 a decade I was alive for, the past only grows  
 longer, and all time before now  
 naive. To pilot this gift of myself ——— how could I fathom a thing  
 like forever?

## *Geraniums*

Sunrise showed itself in. I wanted something  
in my window box. Daylight

filling the lung of my living room, bathed  
in a marigold breath. Someone keeps

closing the blinds. One day I'll strip them  
off the frame. Imagine the atmosphere

another color, a kind of stained-glass planet  
with air dyed a zaffer blue. Intelligent life, there's surely

more of it, asking what color it is  
this morning, which sunbeams show

the fragile openings of a sanctuary. My flowers grow  
tall as the tongue is bilingual. They need me

to water them. They need to be flirted with, light  
courting soil the way a wave washes the coast, stealing

until the sand is submerged. Seized, then released  
a dried hostage. Low tide, the slow pour

of a sanguine wine, decanting. The window  
keeping out a breeze. My trowel between fingers.

A day cools after so many hours.  
I keep sprouting blisters, peeling off

blisters. Burst pads of skin like shriveled petals.  
Why isn't the plural *gerania*? I took Latin.

As I deadhead, I smell  
lavender. The sky ebbs toward something like it. ■