

Mark Wagenaar

Bess Houdini: Velocimancy

—divination by falling bodies

Bring me back, you say to me each time
you disappear. But it's when you're falling through the empty air

that the world falls away. This crowd, their gasps.

Memory, too: my father in his delirium,
the look in his eyes. The Yiddish word for the light in your lover's hair.

You step from the bridge, & plummet to the Charles,
sunstruck bead in freefall
along an invisible rail, if the abacus totals

the times you cheated death, a number
I have lost—but are my days counted? Or is my name written, if at all,
in a book of snow adrift on a river?

Once, on a London stage, my kiss freed you from the chains
& manacles even your body—alchemical, twice resurrected, feather

stripped from an impossible bird—could not loosen.

And though Abraham counted the stars,
the body we are cannot beget another:

no one will survive us, Prince of the Air, Handcuff King.
Beloved. I pull you from the dark & press you to me, into
our own vanishing.

Kyrie: Broken Sonnet with Coming Years

In late evening the streetlights open their orange eyes.
Then I'll see the silhouettes crowding the window:
the coming years, no longer distant, pressing their faces to the glass.

They bring no comfort. I am unfamiliar to them, a shadow,
only a possibility. I have nothing to tell them. *O ghost*, one says,
what have you left.
Some are quiet. Some will not return tomorrow.

You can become that quiet. The people around you hurry on, bouquets
of dust & light, as if towards some great traveling show,
but here you are, with nothing to say about the past
to the rest of your days.

Evening's already wheeling in its rack of shrouds.
Stars poke through,
pins plunged through black moths from the other side. None of them stay,
these faceless years, they walk off into the falling snow

barefoot, here as soon as they're gone (one part of unknowing:
we see by the light of other lives going).

