

Keep Him There

on Second Avenue in his white T-shirt, jeans securely fastened, before you smile at him, before he smiles back. Before he asks for your phone number and you give it. Keep him there before karaoke, the silly Whitney Houston song when he asks you to dance, before you lean in and realize how long it's been, before he puts his hands on you from behind, calls you *beautiful*, and you believe him in spite of yourself. Keep him there before he pulls your shirt off, kisses the meat of your chest, takes your chin in his hands, says, *Look at you*. Before the nights of *I'm so lucky*, the vacation, the deserted road in Provincetown when he drops the bike, makes love to you. Keep him there before it's comfortable, before the corner by the deli when you ask him if your shirt looks okay, and he snaps, *You worry too much about nothing*. Before the window you leave open because the apartment is empty and strange. Keep him there before your friends are tired of hearing it and you sit on the floor in the middle of take-out boxes watching *Taxi*. Before you're numb, before you know everyone walks around with holes in them. Keep him there before the other men, the one with the shoulders and the slow voice, the Counting Crows CD you buy again because it reminds you, before the good days when you only think of him once, before it's been several months and you say, *I'm okay*. Keep him there before that Sunday when you pass him on Broadway and you're awkward, way too friendly, like two strangers after a long correspondence, finally meeting.

Working Out with the Boys

They could be making love,
these straight boys, judging
from the sounds, their breathing

quick, forced like before orgasm:
the soft strain of men pushing
their bodies, breaking

themselves down while other men watch
or help. Someone saying, *Come on,*
come on, push it, push: a final

throaty groan, an almost come-
cry, as a barbell is raised
one more time, one

more time, then dropped
or slammed down
on the mat, muscles

exhausted, trembling, high
fives, a shirt raised to wipe sweat
from a face. They're not like me,

but they are, staring at their own
swollen biceps and chests in
full-length mirrors on the wall

we pretend are for checking form: knees
slightly bent, back straight, slow,
smooth movements, *remember*

to breathe. Of course they're here
to be made more beautiful—
but who would ever admit that?—

lying flat on backs, balancing
huge weights over chests,
—holding, holding—arms

about to collapse when
another man standing
close, staring straight

into his friend's struggling face,
leans over fast,
reaches, finally, in.

Dr. Engel Buys the Jesus-on-a-Spring Action Figure

and spends a few minutes
mirroring the way the lordandsaviorchristalmighty's hands
clap or seem to

have been clapping
or are getting ready to clap again (go team jesus!)
or were maybe praying (our father which art) and have been released

like a bad film straight to DVD or video. Or maybe
jesus has hands to go with his vibrating, his floppy
frenzy: goofy, limp-wristed. Dr. Engel imagines

suction-cupping

jesus to the side of his computer (tech junky jesus) while he e-mails,
a nice alternative to the cross, *at the cross, at the cross*
where I first saw the light . . .

or to the hood
of his mother's scratched-up toy-

ota corolla that's red as blood (too easy to think blood, but still
Dr. Engel thinks it), the blood of the lamb, the blood

of the lamb springing up and down, retarded
some might think, going, going, going, going . . .

Notes Composed in a Heat Wave

I realize a strange affection
for my doctor because he knows

too much and is happy.

I'm dizzy in Manhattan and think
how terrible our lives behind these walls.

I saw inside once,

imagined brick and steel dissolved,
and I could hardly stand how we carried on,
stacked on top of each other, separate floors,
divided into rooms, so close

and yet so lonely. Nothing's real

in August, heat dissolving us to body. Yesterday,
I had an intimate relationship
with the throat of a man on a crowded train.
He smelled like soap and second chances.

My doctor prescribes another pill.
So much work to feel
happy. I tell him I cried

this morning because we die,
because we are given back. He says,

but not tomorrow. He says, *you really
should try to be kind to yourself.*

Secrets of an Identity Thief

Never give your name. Call yourself *Gone Again* or *Probably*. Listen to conversations around you in restaurants. They have everything

to do with you but aren't anything you can't laugh about at parties. Sell yourself short, at a discount, fifty percent off the lowest price. Bargain bin. Two for one.

But never give yourself, not even once, for free. Say, *No*. Say, *I wasn't able to*. *I'll get back to you as soon as I can*. Every train leaving: be on it.

Every love ending: cause it. Everything that's asked of you is too much. Say, *Too much*. Say, *I used to*. Say, *I never wanted this*.