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Autumnal

Robert Lietz

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Autumnal

for E.A.M.

November nights, like faces on hollow clocks.
 The first rains cold enough for snow,
 taxis enamoured of young girls with destinations.
 I watch how the runnels from the drainpipes
 smack the tar of the drive, rise, fall,
 break into small bulbs of reflected light.

Watermarks lengthen toward the center of our ceiling.
 There is nothing we can do till spring,
 the owner has assured us. *You are present
 where land drifts, suggested by dulcimers,
 and I am timid with questions, having entered
 your world brooding, pinned with slow movement.*

This morning, as I follow each step
 heel to toe, my eyes fix on this cup
 filled brim-high with coffee, on this milk
 that swirls from the bottom of the cup
 like an image up the spine.

I take responsibility for the painted stones
 and heavy bindings crowding each other.
 The shelves are sanded smooth and lacquered,
 our lungs bleached with a fine dust.

A woman's fingers stretch and roll octaves
 over the white keys, an old song called back
 from somewhere . . .

Circle and square, turning forever one to another,
 the moon cramps, having gone the distance,
 its eyes accustomed to lights out. The stones
 have started their long season of aching.

*The stone is man, a man, become man, becoming stone,
 bristling like fields where wheat
 has been cribbed for weeks.*

So height is forgotten, and blades the constellations
 swing. My pace across the rugs
 and hardwoods focuses dawn on a black spot.
 Small drops of coffee

spill across the brim, soak into the carpet.
 The coffee that stays pales
 as I walk and pause.

—Robert Lietz