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Over the Other Side of the Country

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OVER THE OTHER SIDE OF THE COUNTRY

I

November, walking home
he recalls a lover
from college days;
the leaves, curled and wet,
remind him.

He breathes in quick,
surprised at the memory.

It has been years;
no name comes to mind.

On his doorstep
a cat bats her tail,
annoyed at his absence.

He lets her indoors
then sits by the window
studying the curtains.

The cat jumps to his lap,
her paws on his chest;
he strokes her spine:

“Tahti—to what do I owe this pleasure?”

II

What were his best years?
He thinks,
and cannot put them all in one.
A time when he was ten,
watching his father
tie wires for the fencing,
tying them so tightly
a red flush would rise along the palms;
and suddenly he misses his father.

The birth of his son,
the tiny feet fanned like angel's wings;
then Melinda leaving,
taking the boy.

A girl in a bar, not over 25
asked him between puffs on a Lucky,
“So like, what’s it like at 40?”
“The same as 20—only paunchier.”
Of course she laughed and as they danced
she whispered to his ear lobe
how she could take off ten years.

III

Melinda

In summer
they stayed in Virginia
in a cabin
with its warm insides
of russet and fire.

He remembers waking to a movement from her
and watching her pad to the window
before morning really came.
She breathed on the glass
and formed a round kiss
which would dirty the pane
when the mist disappeared.
She stood there for minutes,
goose bumps rising along her legs.
He imagined her breasts firming to the cold,
but she stood there for minutes
and never really came back.

IV

The cat sleeps on his lap
like a warm velvet lamb.

Outside streetlamps glow smokily in the rain.
The storm crackles—red from the brake lights of passing cars,
red from the ABC store's neon sign down the street,
red from the wet brick doorstep incubating
under the porch light. . . .

And so they are gone.

He had lost them somewhere
behind the fences, the cabin,
the angel's wings,
cold mornings and warm ones
Wet nights like these in Georgetown
A cat, a curtain,
A nameless lover
living somewhere
over the other side of the country.

L. Danielle Beazer