

Bon Soir is a Feeling Not a Time

As I wait at the front desk,
the clerk says *bon soir*
is a feeling not a time.

We are in Paris in the spring,
sick of being in each other's company,
this *soir* grit
between our teeth.
I imagine divorce,
and though I have promised
myself no more divorce,
this feeling involves lawyers
and thick stacks of paper and a judge.

I sit in the lobby chair,
an angry, dark turtle
in my evil shell.
The clerk is right.
Everything is a feeling
not a time,
even the things
that happen on the dot
of some clock.

What is the feeling of *bonne nuit*
or *bonjour*?
What will the moment
be like that cracks
into the moment
that is not this sad
dwelling on how we talk
to each other
when we talk about everything?

The clock ticks, the lobby stays quiet,
the *soir* moves into another hour.
The feeling stays the same.

Clarins

Near the Japanese ponds at Giverny,
a Russian woman hunts me down by smell.
What is your perfume? she asks, running, her daughter
next to her, my mother next to me,

the four of us an unlikely square of female age.
I hold out the fragile underside of my forearm, describe the bottle
of body lotion jailed on the hotel's bathroom wall.

The woman is stout and strong with dyed blonde hair

and lots of red lipstick. Her daughter is tall and dark-eyed, touching my arm. "She's been searching for you!" she says, as her mother takes my wrist, pulls my beating heart to her nose. My mother is silent, her laugh a rictus of unknowing, her expression past confusion,

a constant surprise of the moment, each turn new.

The Russian woman restates the name of the French lotion, intent on the juniper and nut fragrance, wanting an old memory or a new future, all of us surrounded by colors Monet

swirled into shapes, but this moment he never found, an invisible fluttering in the spaces between water and willow. Here a questing he didn't paint, we searching for scents and sights and tastes, things

we never discovered, things we can no longer remember, cannot find here, in the greens and spangled reds, yellows, and blues, secrets tucked into the undersides of the lily pads, the sky a drizzle of incandescent light.



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