

**JEFF P. JONES**  
**These Buildings**

**1**

This building is frail. Does it bear saying  
that it has something of me in it?

Years ago I stepped off a train without my friend.  
I'd thought she was behind me but, looking back,  
saw her in the side corridor on her knees, hands at her throat,  
red face draining to blue. It was a foreign country  
and the train's next stop was another city.  
I ran alongside until the platform ended, then just stood there,  
watching the distance between us grow.

There's a saying in an obscure language,  
seven words whose meaning has never  
been fully translated because the sense  
derives from the gaps between the words,  
chasms plummeting with regret that life  
can only ever contain itself.

**2**

I wish I could live again. Not this life,  
no, but life itself bears repeating.

Imagine these granite blocks standing lonely  
and loyally in the night, recalling the cinch of belts,  
the acts of levitation that lifted them to their places,  
the hands and polishing tools that touched them  
with so much care. They wait in the dark for day to come.  
On the walls beside the bank of elevators perch the corporate symbols  
in their brushed steel splendor, as alive and silent as owls.

**3**

She'll be from Pennsylvania. We'll meet in Bruges or Brussels,  
American backpackers forming a fast friendship around what they  
call brutal honesty. There'll be no irresistible physical attraction, just  
that fervent spark of connectivity that leads to endless conversation.  
Since we'll both be headed toward the same city we'll have decided to  
catch the train together. She'll hoist her backpack, smile, say "Shall  
we?"—and step up into the passenger car. I'll follow. We'll have yet to  
exchange information. I'll know only her first name . . .

which reminds me of a sociology experiment done somewhere in California. A happily married man, as they say, well known in his small town, agreed to be seen walking hand in hand each day for a week with a woman who wasn't his wife. The social scientists wanted to test the community's tolerance for an open display of infidelity. The parameters were strict: three walks per day at fifteen minutes each. The man's wife was in full cooperation; in fact, she was the lead sociologist who'd designed the study. In order to clear everything up, a full disclosure would be run in the local newspaper at the end of the experiment. The hand-holding couple fell in love, of course. The restrictions placed on their meetings led to an irresistible fusion of anticipation and intimacy. On the third walk of their third day together the man professed his love. On the fourth day the team of sociologists were in their usual places on the walking route, cameras and recorders ready to capture the townspeople's responses. The couple failed to appear and never were seen again . . .

which, finally, makes me wonder what you think of them, these buildings. Do you ever imagine them at night? The elevator cars silent and still, suspended high in their shafts from cables no bigger than wrists, each link as breakable as a finger hooked inside a belt loop. Their I-beams wedded with bolts slid into place long ago, their stones sated lovers resting atop each other, their windows framed tears. Trains climbing toward clouds, bubbles closeting sacred spaces, fingers reaching through concrete—these buildings, fleeting as the grass of the field and as frail.