

## WESTON CUTTER

### Water over Water

We're closer to ocean than the limits of sky but it doesn't feel that way—I'm three hours from a woman who whispered *I'll miss you* in a language I barely speak, five from anything I'd point to if asked *What's home?* In the seat next to me a young man cradles a woman he didn't have to leave in a country he never dreamt he'd dream so often about. She stirs, he shifts, we bump arms. They're maybe five years younger, eight, than I was when I believed I could take my love with me anywhere—a darker side of town, a different country—yet here I am, miles high, still wanting love to be more like wine: close at hand, plentiful, in containers which, once opened, stay opened until every drop's consumed. *Sorry*, he smiles, I smile, then turn again to the window. I suppose there's an ocean down there beneath the oceanic clouds, and beneath that ocean there must be whole whorls of life gone undocumented—creatures uncatalogued, imagination-boggling monsters of shadow and privacy. We believe the monsters are down there waiting for us and our nature documentaries, believe the monsters will wait. His sigh is massive, big as a time zone, and we both look at the woman restlessly resting in his arms. Fatigue pocks his face but I want to whisper *We have to keep letting each other go to hold on. Our only real discussions are tactile, our only stories of longing* and for months it was magic, her fluid and strange words, yet now all I want is to understand her when she says *I'll miss you*. Something's important in the hearing of it. His finger grazes the tiny cup of water on his tray and he brings his pregnant finger to his girlfriend's lower lip, rubs the small wetness in. She doesn't move but to me he whispers *She's burning up; she's been like this since Umbria*.

The first night. Dim hills stretching darkly beyond the house's clay walls. The hearth lit with so much fire it seemed ceremonial, even our shadows trailed smoke. The kitchen dark after our long meal—mussels, bread, wine—the bedroom upstairs with sheets turned down and pillows arranged, but, for now, we sat in an old stone room off her kitchen. Wide screenless windows, long cool benches, the night gathering around and around us. Bats swooping among hills and her hand smooth, calm on mine. *The windows* I pointed.



*What if they get in? The bats?* We could just barely communicate, had traveled from Madrid to Trieste with a window always nearby—view as sketch pad, pictorial dictionary—telling our stories to each other, stripped and un-elaborate: the barest bits of self, just enough. *Bats?* she asked, and I pointed to the dark shapes beyond in the dark sky, used my free hand to mimic a wing, some flying thing. She shook her head and rubbed her nose on my cheek. *No come in.* We watched a handful of bats swoop, glide pale-bellied almost within reach, right past the window, and she was right. *An unseen screen,* I thought, *something Italian,* and we sat together, letting our silence seep and our exhaustion deepen, watching bats fling themselves through dark before we finished the wine, spread the fire to embers, climbed the stairs to the bed in which she above me whispered *All the love* and I beneath her didn't say or think a word of translation.

She groans, he shifts again into me. Ten minutes ago the pilot told us to look down, that we were above the deepest trench on the planet. *If you flipped Everest over, shoved it down there, it still wouldn't reach bottom.* Her cheeks are flush, eyes for a moment wild—she didn't expect to wake up this far from the ground. *Are you okay?* he asks her and I hold my breath, translate, practice. *Siete buono?* Nods. Smiles. *It's so hot* she says and though he already must've known—his own love as oven, there in his arms, of course he could feel—her saying it changes something. *Here,* he says, brings the water to her lips. The plane shudders. Now is the moment to fear, to clutch at anything stable. Shudders again—a throat readying to shout, a surface broken by a pebble—then we stabilize. We look at each other, the young man and I, then at the woman in his arms. She says *Water over water,* settles deeper into his arms and chest. With a different faith I might believe, though both float so seemingly easily across great gashes of night, that there's some difference between our tin cradle and the changeling moon way out, gibbous and ghostly. He sets the water back down,



the cup's nearly empty. There's a story she keeps trying  
to tell me, about her father and mother, some boat trip they took  
and ended up stranded, some island. *They burn*  
*the boat* she keeps telling me; it's not metaphor or story but true,  
I've looked up all the words, for burning, for boat,  
for stranded. Two nights and their only warmth the burning bits  
of what should've carried them back.  
*How long?* asks the girl in his arms, the girl next to me. Out the window  
there's so much distance to the next cloud, far light, it's hard  
to believe there's such a thing as touch, arrival: *How long until we're back?*