

**ELIZABETH LANGEMAK**

**Expectation**

*I suffer all the time: I have no relief, no escape: it is monotony—  
monotony—monotony—in pain.*

—Walt Whitman, in the week preceding his death

Walt Whitman, when I stood unmoved  
at your tomb, I wondered, then, what place

might move me. I read the plaque  
but you were not in the grass. I touched

the moss and still you stonewalled  
from inside your barred hole in the hill,

from your casket stacked up  
with your kinfolk. Like a pebble

dropped into stale waters, your death  
rung out others: around the cemetery

the gray hospitals, pale office buildings,  
then chop shops and shacks with their

flagging dispositions, paint shattered  
on panes, cast-off condoms and careless

tires. To be invisible is to barely be,  
and so Camden becomes, with you

lodged at its heart in your reluctant  
sublime, your drunken embrace

become hangover, your tickled palm  
turned itch. In your quiet park

on that sweated morning, I knew  
what you meant by monotony, I felt

the old expectation, the wanting  
of wanting, I suffered for lack of better

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pains, and from this there is no relief  
either. But also hear this: just as sure

as each breath beat its path from your lungs  
as it beats now from mine, as you are

bones in a box as I stand in my skin,  
as we both should have known

you would not wait at this place,  
hear how my voice has the gait

of a woman who wanted something  
better. And is not afraid to ask.