Maybe So

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CHARLES O. HARTMAN

MAYBE SO

We have a little time here
and are so small it can seem endless.
We begin by seeing the light, which is too bright,
and end in seeing it go too dim. Between,
—well, between we have jobs and babies,
opinions, loads of opinions. We have friends,
lovers, and we learn how little our opinions mean
because of them. We discover fear
and take years to grow intrigued by it,
find out how live we are on the edge of the bridge.
We discover love and recognize it as fear.
Between, we ask what the agenda is.
The agenda is the end. Never mind. And the light,
every day from its beginning and ours, sometimes more
and sometimes less, comes back to begin us over.
Just when we think we knew the front yard’s routine
arrives the cardinal, two, the bright tangerine of her beak
the only thing in the world her wide eyes can’t see,
the pick of his pert chirp slung over and over
at the rock-face of the morning, that blank chert
he exposes garnets in. We shake our heads
and go off to work, because work is what we do,
and that is its definition. You know this.
I know that. We have a little time here. We stockpile
batteries and pens, saxophone reeds for some,
for others sheep—it’s all to the good.
They tell us it won’t count. We know
what counts. Maybe it’s even
because of all we’ve done
that a kiss comes in the middle of an afternoon,
not a new kiss if that means new lips,
new shoulders rounded into our awkward arms,
but still: a kiss that stops time for us, stops us
short on the bridge as if it had got rid
finally of its end and its beginning.
We remember that. Even at the end,
we remember that beginning, when the light
looked over our shoulder
and made us memorize every leaf, every feather,
every fear we came to love with, and the love.