

Shoulder Dancing

Geoff places his list in the hands of a recovering agoraphobic
at the flower shop. Carnations for Laura, baby's breath
going to his mother. Peonies are in season, so a bouquet
of those. "My sister from Sioux Falls, she's here tomorrow,"
he says, four days on the wagon, spider plants hovering his shoulders
like epaulets. The radio percolates 80s lunch hour music, orchids and A-Ha dancing

in a cooler of terracotta light, the tulips having danced
themselves out stations ago. The florist, Mike, worn from agoraphobia
asks his manager, the one with shoulder
pads, to cut the stems. These steps take more than breath
but the group keeps talking reintegration. A book store today,
a movie theatre tomorrow,
afternoons the safest – just him, the box office lady,
a concessionaire's bouquet

and wreaths of film running their bows. A quiet
illness, this shutting in, parabolas of deadbolts dancing
off his résumé, a friend of a friend hiring him at
20 hours a week, tomorrow's
paycheck cashed at the bank, the teller's acrylics
soothing to an agoraphobic.

Geoff signs the card for Laura, tremens twisting his penmanship
the way vermouth stained his breath.

Better luck nailing billboards to the sun than shouldering

LOVE. He thinks music should err

on the side of DEVO – men with heads halfway to bouquets,
thirty years of lyrics trellising the library of his breath.

He'll order amaranths, toss them like a ballet of sobriety chips, dancers
tidying the stage for that Agoraphobics

In Motion group afterward. Last week a doctor told him
he was borderline cirrhotic. Tomorrow

the follow-up. Geoff's earlier diagnosis: benign tumors, rows
of them muddling his skin, gradations of collarbone
distancing his shoulders.

Mike steels himself for the agoraphobic
hurdle of shopping after work. He'll choose Family Market on 24th –
safety in its second generation doors, in its bouquets
of fruit, self-preservation an ungainly dance.

More cauldron than dial, the radio slips into The Police's "Every Breath

You Take." *Good decade, bad demons*, Mike thinks, breathing
impatiens through glass. Group meets at a restaurant tomorrow.

He hasn't held a menu in years. Hierarchies of forks, that'll be a dance.

When in doubt, order soup. Vie for a booth. No brushing of shoulders.

Geoff digs for his wallet, scrapes a stowaway flask. Even the bouquets
get a drink, the concept of life in a vase as alluring as it is agoraphobic.

Two men, the alcoholic and the agoraphobic, breathing
synth-pop bouquets, thinking tomorrow in plant years where
the minutes dance faster, the songs shoulder greater weight.