

Shoulder Dancing

Geoff hands his list to the agoraphobe
in the flower shop. Carnations for Laura, baby's breath
going to his mother. A bouquet
of marigolds as well. "My sister's here tomorrow,"
he says, days off the wagon. Spider plants cling to his shoulders
like epaulets, eighties music dances

through cindered felt, the speakers having danced
themselves out stations ago. Agoraphobia
surging (it makes a terra-cotta of his shoulders),
the florist cuts a dozen stems. Living takes more than breath—
a bookstore today, a movie theatre tomorrow.

Afternoons are safest, just the concessionaire's bouquet

and wreaths of film running their bows. A quiet
illness, shutting in, watching the deadbolts dance.
He'll cash his check at the bank tomorrow,
the teller with church-window acrylics soothing to an agoraphobic.
Geoff signs the card "To Laura," vermouth stranded on his breath.
Better luck nailing billboards to the sun than shouldering

"Love." A sometime drummer, he thinks music should err
on the side of Devo, men with heads halfway to bouquets,
synthetic lyrics trellising their breath.

He mistakes the snapdragons for sobriety chips—pendants
in partitioned rooms, an agoraphobia
support group two walls over. Last week a doctor told Geoff
he was cirrhotic. The follow-up tomorrow,

these hours too narrow
for the scrutiny of shoulders.

The flower cutter steels himself against the phobia
of shopping after work. He'll choose Fry's on Twenty-Fourth,
safety in its second-generation doors, 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*, he 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
drink, life in a vase as alluring as it is agoraphobic.

Clematises unravel in his breath as he shoulder-
dances past the man with agoraphobia. In the backroom
the botanist's silhouette, lilacs for tomorrow's bouquet.