

Homage For Levis

What angers me now
is how you've become just a story

I struggle to follow, stalking the tracks of birds
in the wind, while all around the sea and sky

empty around me, their colors showing where everything
must separate and end.

All around is the horizon

and a few branches scattered on the sea
torn apart by churning surf, fragments of earth cast out

like fragments of speech,
a Morse code for a new continent—

Which is a kind of beauty, a kind of starting out.

If you knew me now, you'd see my neighbor
has turned the light on again in his window, panicking
at curtain and switch,

as if, for a long while now, he's been waiting for someone

here, in your city,
where love is harder to achieve
than happiness, it seems. Harder than fame
or a bone breaking:

a place where a man and his wife might drive to my house
and ask for the hospital half a mile away.

Today they had a map, a clean white truck, a bag of food and flowers.
Please, the man asked in Spanish.

His map was wrong. And I could see
by the way the woman beside him was twisting and twisting
the shirt ends in her lap that they'd been driving
for a very long while. *Please*,

the man said. How I wish

I had a better story. How I wish
I'd had a translator then, a father like you,
someone pacing all night by the warm light
at his window, someone so anxious to do right

that he would have been, in his own way,
responsible for me.

Tell me what it means to be prepared for someone.

Tell me what it means to look past the poses of envy and fear,
to speak Spanish as if one were fluent,
to look an unknown man in the eye, past his panic
and your own futility, your own incoherent gestures—

In one of your poems, this man and woman would have just come
from harvesting fruit down in the valley. Their son
would be the one in the hospital, the one
who was born here, unlike them, who would be

like you are now, invisible.

The woman, she's maybe ten years younger than her husband.
She looks out the truck window

and I have no idea what she's thinking
as she nods absently in her rising hopelessness

for her son, who might have been taken
to the emergency room by an aunt or teacher,
who might have as little wrong with him
as an earache that won't quite fade,
but this—the simply traveling to him from work
is enough to show how little she possesses,

the map they've been given—crudely drawn
and all its directions reversed.
Do you know the map you once gave me?

And here I am, still maneuvering by it.

Now I need a destination,
if not an answer. I need a place
in which every kind of story makes sense to me.

The truck stalls in my driveway.
The man and woman listen to my broken Spanish, they turn to one another
and negotiate as a curtain snaps open in my neighbor's window.

For a moment, I can almost imagine this

as a kind of communication,
like the elaborate hand gestures
the first sailors used with each other on their ship,

the boy waving down to his boatswain from the crow's nest:

another scrap of sail caught
in the wind, too far past sound, too far past expression and speech.

He is himself one of the long, dark boats of the West,

waving and waving in
the new haze shape he sees as he strains into the horizon:

one fat branch bobbing in the water, bark curled
and pale flesh peeling. A piece of pine,
a length of seaweed.

First one bird, and then another.