

Keith Althaus

Listening To Music

(for Tomas Tranströmer)

Tonight, by the light
of a single star
cast on the ceiling
from the imperfect
meeting of grids
above the pilot
on the stove,
I sit at the table
listening to music
and remember how
once I saw my soul
reduced to a dot of light
in the brain, my body
become a plastic shell
filled with black liquid
that left me voiceless,
paralyzed except
to watch and wait
moment by moment
for it to engulf me,
before the drug wore off.
And then even as
the paranoia ebbed,
I tried to will myself
back up to that height
in spite of the pain,
because it was more real.

That night I came down
from near madness
through the exhilarating
wake of fear
into a state of grace;

awed by the frailty
we live with every day,
bolted to our sanity
and health, unaware
their shadows walk
so closely beside us.
Just as I thought
the terror would never end,
so I thought the grace
would last forever,
it felt so natural,
but it was soon gone,
imperceptibly,
as seasons change
in the city.
And although that state
has not returned
the thought of it
is with me often;
how calm it was
and blissful,
despite chaos
and discord, the flaws
and errors only acting
to overcome
the incompleteness
of perfection,
break the vacuums
of abstractions,
the way tonight,
eyes closed,
the scratchy record
becomes a room
where sputtering candles
light the keyboard,
and stiff pines
scrape the windows
behind a quartet.