

James Harms

The Sequel

At the public library on Sunset Boulevard
you were in love with the truth of a young girl,
though not with the young girl.

It would be illegal to love her.

You were warm as the tip of breath leading
to a promise, the ficus growing like a cheer
beside the noisy ferns.

But when was this version of hello
nearly heartfelt? a handshake in the alcove
leading to gunshots? hands signing
the letter C like perfect broken bowls,
collecting the particles per thousand?

You want the small pressure
like a fortune in your pocket,
though what's ever smart, at last, about
the standards of deliverance?

An accident tangles traffic late
on a Thursday morning, and you feel
the blanket pull across your face before
seeing the twisted motorcycle, the helmet
strapped like something cherished to the seat.

Why aren't you in that Subaru? wearing a suit?
at home with a child who looks like you?

And why stare ahead over the tops of
a thousand cars when what you want
is to face death like an argument
you really feel something about?

There's a league at least of dirty air
between you and God, but that's not it,
that's not what led you away from the cereal bowl
and an orange, the day as straight and remembered
as a line of royal palms.

You were asking Rachel about the movies,

you'd met Rachel at Benson's in Newport the night before. She'd seen the sequel to a movie you'd never heard of, and it was Damn good, she said. Better than the first one.

You were in the public library on Sunset last Sunday and you remembered your friend, one of Rilke's children, the scarves he seemed to pull from some forgotten sleeve, how he hated saying good-bye. And then the young girl said, We're about to close, and you looked at her as if she could change your life. She couldn't. She almost said it. She almost said, I cannot do a thing for you. She said, You'll have to leave now.