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Transubstantiation

The first rain after winter melts through
the last ashen clumps of snow, and in
the weird weather between seasons,
the sun has come out. Icicles drip,
a diamond each drop. I quit smoking
again, this time for good, because of
a junior high teacher, whom I despised,
but who bled me a pint of his blood
when I slammed into a semi, head-on,
half my life ago. Then the others
who came and rolled up their sleeves
so this fuckup kid could keep doing
whatever it was he was doing.
I was doing. The blood in my veins
is not mine, is liquid, like rain
chasing winter away. Tramping east
on Adams, under the train, I stop
for a woman who asks for a light.
I say, sure, and give her my lighter
and pack. Drops of water refract
the sun's glare, and I keep seeing
diamonds. The first glance of Spring
shimmers on windows. Diamonds,
everywhere, as I weave in and out
of the late-for-lunch crowd,
the press of present and past.
He paddled my ass dozens of times
because I goofed off, because,
as the kid next to me put it,
He could bore the spots off a snake.
So I laughed out loud, and got paddled
again. But I forgive him the slapstick
pain of my childhood, the hungry knot
behind me, tripping over themselves,
crushing into the oncoming throng

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at the corner. I'm almost free from
downtown, though I don't know where
I am going, only that I've weathered
the cycle so far, only that something
is pulling me forward. And why stop
there? On the horizon I envision
whole hoards who have wronged me,
whether glass or reflection. You should
know who you are, and that I am trying
to untie whatever noose still binds us.
But I'm afraid that this mercy can't last,
that I'll tangle us again, or untangle
the only thing worth keeping whole—
how blood became blood and metaphor is
useless for the miracles we make of each other.
So I start running as fast as I can,
until at last I crest the hill and see
Lake Michigan before me ablaze with the sun
and diamonds, all of it, so many, so bright,
I cannot tell the water from the sky.

Exponential

She jumps from the balcony,
and the ladybug lives for a month.
I leave work and walk to the train.
The cop has already arrived
to cover her up with a sheet.
Although it is windy, and I am cold,
and late to be home to my wife,
I stay and talk to the cop, who also
wants to be home. My eyes climb
36 stories. She left the lights on.
Beneath us the train mutters
its schedule. The wind cycles through,
and the sheet flutters. Pink and red
underneath. I don't want to look,
but my wife thinks we are getting
old. She finds a gray hair, and wonders
if our bodies are winding down.
Six, I spend summers exiled
on the farm with my grandparents,
now dead, catching ladybugs to keep
as pets in a jar. They never last.
I get an e-mail from my father,
who swears that time speeds up
as he ages. So I write back, *Thank God
for e-mail, so we can make up
for lost time.* He is becoming
his parents, my wife is becoming
my mother, and I imagine
this sidewalk coming fast,
the instant of rushing wind,
its dry edge stuck in my throat,
everything hurtling toward me.
I am crying on the back porch
when my grandmother sits down
next to me. *It's not your fault, she says,
they only live for a month.*