

Thank You Terror

MATHIAS SVALINA

I've had this phrase stuck in my head,
for fifteen years or so:
blank domino tile, tenderly.

I thought it first
in the airport in Omaha,
waiting for a delayed flight.

I forgot a blank domino tile
was as a real thing.
I just liked how the words felt.

I have put the phrase in a poem
every now & then, for the last fifteen years,
to see if it might fit, to see if there could be
a line between what I think I was & what I am.

Every time, though, I cut the phrase
before the final draft.
I should have known

I'd never find a place
for such a phrase,
no matter how much sugar
I lick off the birdhouse floor.

continued on the next page

The sounds the mouth makes
to attempt to make meaning
lure me from heartbreak
with their cemetery fog.

I want to chug them
like a blank face, to drown
beneath their one blank face,

& then, there it is again, a blank domino tile,
flawless, saying nothing
but meaning
as much as nothing can.

It's like when I see a movie
& the people in the movie
make me want to see myself.

I am afraid of the escapes I find helpful.
In the car the other day
I asked Levy, who is two years old,
if she believed in god

& she did not respond.
But when I asked her Y'all ready for this?
she said, somewhat resignedly, Yeah...

I guess I've got to keep blank domino tile, tenderly
in this poem now.
But really, I hope I won't.

continued on the next page

I hope I am still in that airport
Waiting for that person, who I loved,
Who loved me, I think,
from year 1998 to the year 2004.

I'd like to be waiting there forever
for that moment of first seeing their face
turn the corner into the long hallway
where I waited on the other side of security,
before all the inevitable stuff happened.

Join me there.
It is 2004.
But we can stay there forever.
Watch them walk
that long walk toward me
& walk it forever.

I hope it is just after midnight,
wherever you are, whoever you are reading this,
just after midnight,
no matter what the clock says.
I hope the sun never rises.
I hope the dark holds us
forever like this
in its blank face.

continued on the next page

I miss you.
Whoever you are,
you perfect blankness
reading this
I hope I can be tender
with you, how
words make meaning
out of distance.
I would like to
be your fan,
to be a moment
in time that continues
after the moment has stopped.
I wish I knew
something I could say
that could help.