

Pillars of Air Against a Charcoal Sky
Some poems by Megan Quirk

and

/and,(ə)n/

conjunction

1. used to connect words of the same [...] that are to be taken jointly

it's pouring on the highway and

you press your foot deeper into the gas pedal and

i turn my head along with the slope of your touch and tires and

i wonder why i only experience fear at the hands of trivial things and

wonder if it's even possible for the hands holding the wheel steady to crash into anything other than the future and

i think of the other night when i made you pull over to droop your eyelids in the backseat, orange leaves and

the way i felt when you laid your head in my lap made me regret letting anyone else's fingers begin to slip and

i don't know if i trust god, you, or the idea that maybe in my next life i will have made up for the sins of this one and

that night, or maybe another just like it, we passed a car wreck so brutal i see it even now, light pole dividing long gone driver and passenger sides and

for days i check the news to see if i can find their names and ages and faces and families and if there is a future under the hood, but to this day my searches still come up blank and

i begin to think i'll have to wonder for the rest of my life, which i have started to come to terms with could be longer than expected now that i know i can want something both on and

off the expressway because i like you on the backroads and backseat and bed and

being alive, when we pass the the streetlight on the highway, or one just like it, i imagine the crash was two people, one of the driver's hands on the wheel and

the other in the passenger's lap, i imagine a desire to hold the wheel steady and no fear of the unknown, or the known, as long as it's with you.

Marching

orange streetlights ignite ashy
pillars of air against a charcoal sky
as smoke plumes from a car engine;
in my eyes the city has already
burnt down around me, and
i'm left to think exhaustively
about everyone i've touched in the last
two weeks and then the first
twenty years, i search
for a soup that can make me
recognize normality when it exists again, or
into someone who never met you
because muscle memory says
this time of year i'm already splintered at a
train station, and the third rail is
calling my name the way
you weren't, and even when the world resumes turning
healing will still be a glass jar i keep
dropping on the floor, healing
pricks my toes, draws blood, and
reminds me i am not, in my mind i am
always veering towards the guard rail, and
the past because somehow
it still holds me more gently
than the future does,
i lean as if my weight can
shift our position on the road, as if
i've ever led us out of the woods, as if
i can see through the smoke,
and when a year begins to creep up i think
of ending things so i won't have to
meet march again, although
when the world shifted with the steering wheel,
guilt remembers i was grateful
this time i wasn't the only one on my back.

the green line

drive over the bumps
of the train tracks and for a moment
we begin to glide the same way

the machine does, parallel to the path the person i was
took last year, and there's really
no heat, except in a college apartment with

a battery powered fan during an unusually warm november or
the blackening of my thumbnail on a lighter, which is odd and makes me wonder
if the last one ever figured out the lighter or the way the world works even with a spoon,

or if i still need the throat burn to know it's working, the way i used to. there's a fly
on the lamp and he bites his nails down to the
bed so i start on mine even though i haven't in years,

something about the winter girls and not eating;
now it's autumn.
i teach everyone i cross to lie to their parents

but never learn how to pick up the phone,
and i begin to think the neurons in my brain are chronically
down turned. i admit even now sometimes my heart still stops

when i hear the last one's name and anything
closely tied to it, i choke down the feeling of swallowing a match
and imagine what it'd be like to see myself how i see others, lights on,

eyes ungoogled, x-ray machine picking up on something i never could from the twelfth
floor. i almost feel like i'm being exiled
to the outskirts of the city, not quite worth downtown,

not now and certainly not then, scraping together high school dogsitting money to be
someone else while the clock and the bank bit at my heels, this one says
this is where college kids live, this is where

his scrappy friends live, this is more like me, more like us,
and the warmth of november when i'm with him tells me for now he's right, so i apologize
for always saying a year ago when i mean two,

i'm afraid of moving farther behind the past
and the train and someone who still believes in the idea of deserving anything.
an old friend says she thinks we've grown yet i feel

like being left at the station on new year's eve before
the clock even strikes midnight,
i have to stop to catch my breath and remind myself of the date.

there are still rooms in my heart that are
blocked off because i can't bear

to cut the tape or let anyone back in until the footsteps are gone,

along with the person i was a year ago and
certainly two, maybe i am a wife by day and daughter by night,
and always a coward and a hypocrite and a taker but

this *me* promises to love you at least until my fingertips are no longer stained blue.
maybe love is no imposition, i answer the phone when i see your name.

magnolia

rainwater
drips from your hair and eyes
saturating the red collar
and cheeks.
you say
“i’m sorry”
for your hair and the teardrops
and you apologize a lot but
nothing ever sounds coppery in your mouth.
i think about ending things in a shatter
before i meet you and
maybe after but instead i
take the elevator and imagine a world where neither
my palm or your gas tank is ever empty
again. and you say “i’m sorry” i say
“i promise”
as if my heart is not made of glass
scattered on the kitchen floor
of barefoot boys
because i trust your touch
and the way you can hold me without
pricking your skin and
starting to bleed. i say
“i promise” swipe my fingers
under your eyes like each freckle represents
the braille letters
of a story
i can only remember in a past life
and vow to relearn in this one.
i step down from
the ledge and instead into
your palm as if holding on to a balloon while
i am nothing but corners and
sharp edges that soften as we race down the stairs
and i want to reach the bottom
in one piece
if that’s where your fingertips lead me.
and when you brush my skin too harshly you say
“i’m sorry”
and i promise
it’s okay despite my glassy fragility
you never leave a mark
or draw blood.
you anticipate the nosebleeds
before they come tissues in hand
and i decide to take it
one step
at a time sans sidewalk mausoleums
because you are the
only one i want to bleed for

although you never
break the skin.

a flower but it is really just a girl

i write these
meaning(ful/less)
poems
with so many words
and hazy metaphors
i've handpicked with delicate coherence
vague enough they're beautiful
not decipherable enough to be truly understood
to be as ugly as reality.
metaphorically speaking
i am a rose no thorns
and i have torn the petals off my heart
in a cruel game of
love me or love me not
that i will never win.
literally speaking
there are thorns
and i am using way too many words
when what i really mean to say is
it hurts,
it hurts,
it hurts.