

PLACEBO

— TODD ROBINSON

Forever we dawdled in a basement like a bomb shelter and called it Shangri-La, my friend the board-certified radiologist who says I am her antidote to existence and me, another human hourglass known for wincing at dash-cam footage of the invincible Sandra Bland, then cutting more pills for breakfast. Secretly, I was getting bored with the lascivious drip of icicles from eaves and found the world unreadable. *I'm so depressed*, she kept saying, and I nodded like a black and white television father. *I'm only a placebo*, I finally rebutted as she chased peas around a plate. When her neurologist texted *expect symptoms to persist for years*, walls we had painted sea-foam green seemed to suddenly loom.

I look old and gaunt,
she cried into her mirror.
No you don't, I lied.

TO BE OLD AND OUT OF LOVE IN OMAHA

— TODD ROBINSON

The bard of the western ache holds himself still in the MRI chute.
Unlucky as an astronaut, his atoms another pulse for magnets to bend.
The unretired nurse who failed to find a vein is reapplying eyeliner.
The technician who called him funny says looks aren't everything.
In the crackling dark particles resonate like a collapsing bridge.
The man wonders what doctors will find in his laboratory abdomen.
In a dream last week his gone grandmother wore clown paint,
babbled on the edge of sense a warning, indecipherable as love:
time is tenseless. In morning's mirror, his features were a chalk outline,
another proof that Socrates is mortal. Back in the rented casket,
derelict banshees keen their beamy songs. Limbs useless as self,
ribbons of minutes spiral, flatten, endlessly expand. Knowing

he will one day die,
the man wonders how long
he can stand to live.