

Heather Altfeld

City Hall Epithalamium

On the way to my wedding,
I ride the 9 train alone, barreling through
the rotted underbelly of Manhattan, trussed
in a black velvet coat, nervous lilacs pinned
to the pocket's edge. *There is earth here somewhere,*
I tell myself,

digging my heels into the sticky floor, clenching
the vile silver pole. 137th Street, City College,
a barrel of black men with Eldridge Cleaver glasses
step on, one slips his hand close to mine—I can feel
his bad black energy, the tick of his cock, watch him smile
at me and look at my feet. 125th, the African Good News
Restaurant, peanut soup chalking up my throat,
the small ting of the balaphone tingling on the platform.
116th, Columbia, the Hasid scholars get on,
hopped up on Maimonides and compote,
their kippot nodding slightly forward,

fringe of their tefillin scattering like God's hairs
around their waists. 110th, 103rd, 96th, the Westside
hurries in, terriers in knitted sweaters,
Zabar's bags. I am sweating. The lilac nods,
sleepy, sullen against the dry velvet,
86th, 79th, I am going to get off, skim beneath the turnstile,
take the crosstown and heave into the trench of the private drive
at the Met, wait for this March cold to simmer
and be in the Rockies by sunup. 66th Street.
They jam jar me against the window, push me up
against the door
like he'd push me up



against something when we first met, tree trunks,
Japanese folding screens, the cold edge of a tub. 59th Street—
I stand, complete with tiny inconspicuous parasite,
steam against the sweated pulse of two bankers
and a Beatles fan, slide into the fatted warmth of a vacant orange seat.
49th, 42nd, 37th, and I won't touch him when I see him,

these are the last moments I have to hold out,
to plane myself to the Coney Island local
that is giving me ground, and power. 23rd, 14th,
I wait on the platform, forty-five minutes
until he arrives, those three blond hairs
perched toward magnetic north,
a daisy corsage in tissue, his ex-wife's favorite flower
smelling of the Haggar slacks my father wore. We ride
now, together, the hum of the tracks lulling me into the
words, now, *sickness, health, death*, we are the last couple
to chasten the bow
of the mockwood podium, I kiss him,
dry and stubborn, sewing myself
to something I don't understand enough to want.