

AND LATE . . .

Adam Clay

... or not but always on time (a gift
from my father: *if you're on time*

you're late), but more likely
because there's no way

to define *early*
in that even a minute

isn't measurable
enough when you're waiting

or waiting
which means: early means being

alone a touch more.
In a poem not about punctuality,

Joe Brainard says: *I think it's always
nice to know you are not*

alone. Even in death. And maybe
thinking of death as a destination

is better than dreading
what's to come — we are here for

a little blink and then
we'll be together for a long while.

FOR A TURTLE EATING A STRAWBERRY

Adam Clay

Life today mostly feels like walking
the line between an elegy and an ode,
between fierce love and silence
boiled down to a rock,
tossed into the lake of the mind.
How not to let a thought go
and to think what would happen
if the path reversed,
if we floated from the water,
love and loss braided endlessly
together but what's the third rail?
And it's easy to say: *it must be us!*,
it must be the human mind!,
but no it can't be so easy
or so simple, like how
a living thing trying to survive
depends on what's being bothered
to be called a pest, to be called
trouble, so what does that make
us? I am taking apart
a thought this morning
so call this poem what you will —
I'll keep the name of the word to myself
while we all keep driving to —
and eventually — through
its *o* and through its *t* and how lucky:
it's easy to love what we don't know.

IMMORTALITY FOR MARY RUEFLE

Adam Clay

I don't often disagree, but today I mouth the idea: *you will live forever*. This impulse finds its way into every moment of every day, so routine it fills the iron with water, it erases wrinkled clothes and skin while you sleep. I know your body is not weightless in water — which is admittedly odd — but when the dust of stars formed your mind, it happened so quickly that your immortality was hidden by unworldly things, not the water collecting on a thorny flower or the seeds dropped from the height of the tree that could cure you of this illness called *life*. You're always on the clock, and not even time can be measured as you move through particles of matter that hold some ancestor you couldn't think to channel. Everyone wants this gift except for you. There was no sense in etching your name in the tree, but you did it anyway.