

***artificial respiration IV***

See, I have certain obligations to my customers, I sell them copper-coated tubes  
& let them push me in my wheelchair. But when the company announces

that it will suspend production of its amazing lungs, what am I to do? *You won't lose  
your job, don't worry!* As if! Here, hand me toilet paper, hand me webcams,

none of those high-tech warehouses, no chess sets with their unblinking eyes. No,  
I'm taking to the beach, tonight if I can. I'm looking for sand or to be struck dead

by falling coconuts. *I am looking for additional paid time!* Please respond.

*artificial respiration V*

How much longer can we keep this up? Sirens ringing (*again*).  
Shortly before nightfall, I sprinkle diluted bleach  
across my stoop, banana peels rot on the steps while,  
above, cardinals fall short of breath. *Difficulty breathing.*

Here, let us speak informally, as though we are friends! Do you have any  
pressure behind the eyes? I, too, was a student once, with a memorized vocabulary,  
trafficking in armchair data. *Answers are rarely tidy*, we can agree,  
*but with swollen faces, can we rely upon cellular towers for love? For coffee or tap water?*

Our narrator should applaud these realizations, but, paralyzed, I do not.  
There are rashes forming on my cheekbones. The television coos like a child  
swaddled in my arms. Midnight. I am cold. I am just fine. I could use a beer.

*artificial respiration VI*

The life of a retiree is not for you. You move through the room  
swallowing fistfuls of aspirin, tacking photographs  
of aging senators above the mantle. Beneath the chairs,

from the sinks, small mammals with long fingers gather,  
watching. *We cannot speak about death in this silence!* one yells at you,  
his lips thin in that pastel way that John Waters' lips are thin.

Alas, such is the way of life in these tropical afternoons: the rains  
wash skin from our ribs & our spines; corpses & a variety  
of federally sanctioned pills sink like gold to the bottom of the river.

& alas, such is life for these dexterous mammals, condemned  
to watch you the way a courtroom stenographer studies the accused.  
*You limp like a crippled economy, they laugh. Always walking  
in circles, still dragging to the left like a bat with a broken wing!*