

AN EXPLANATION

They say this really happened, in the Church of Eternal Light:
a penitent dropped to the floor wearing nothing but sweat, she
spasmed like some snake on an electrified wire, she uttered
angel eldestspeech, and then she disappeared—they mean
totally, and at once. First the entire tarpaper room gave a shudder,
and then she disappeared—at once, and totally.

Nobody understands it. Well,
maybe I understand it. Once, in 8th grade, Denton Nashbell
had an epileptic seizure. Mrs. Modderhock squatted
above where he flapped like something half a person
half a pennant, she was pressing a filthy spoon to his tongue.
I've remembered him 25 years now. And—that woman? she
was the universe's tongue the universe
swallowed. That's as good an explanation as any.
Once, in sleep, you started a dream soliloquy,
the grammar of which is snow on fire, the words are
neuron-scrawl, are words the elements sing to their molecules . . .
—I threw myself across you.

It wasn't sex this time. I just wanted to keep you
beside me, in this world.

THE SCIENCES SING A LULLABYE

Physics says: go to sleep. Of course
you're tired. Every atom in you
has been dancing the shimmy in silver shoes
nonstop from mitosis to now.
Quit tapping your feet. They'll dance
inside themselves without you. Go to sleep.

Geology says: it will be all right. Slow inch
by inch America is giving itself
to the ocean. Go to sleep. Let darkness
lap at your sides. Give darkness an inch.

You aren't alone. All of the continents used to be
one body. You aren't alone. Go to sleep.

Astronomy says: the sun will rise tomorrow,
Zoology says: on rainbow-fish and lithe gazelle,
Psychology says: but first it has to be night, so
Biology says: the body-clocks are stopped all over town
and
History says: here are the blankets, layer on layer, down and down.

THE EARLIEST PUNCTUATION

*occurs around 364 BC—a mark
between words, to indicate separation*

it's like the midwife's knife

*

Later, at the departure gate, she
waved to him—her hand
against the distance now
an apostrophe giving
up possession.

*

Morgan says her ritzy pal hired a Guatemalan maid who didn't know English: when she returned, she found the maid—who admittedly wore a puzzled expression—scouring out the tub with a can of parmesan cheese. / When Kendall was still in junior high, she appeared on a Baptist Radio Network whiz kids quiz show: she'd been studying art, and when they asked her what building appeared in the back of Woods's "American Gothic" she knew, she answered out loud in front of her parents and God: "A whorehouse" and the emcee, who couldn't believe his ears, asked again, so she repeated it: slowly. / Lisa tells me her birthday is the first