

SHAKESPEARE'S AT THE OFFICE

*"For my part I know nothing with any certainty,
but the sight of the stars makes me dream."
~Vincent Van Gogh*

Shakespeare's at the office, sounding out syllables.
His sonnet's all paper jams, PC LOAD LETTER
errors, and the changing of typewriter ribbons for Ophelia
from Underwriting — *for the fourth time this week*.
And only one line for autumn leaves, the grass growing spare.

Shakespeare sticks with the sonnet 'cause, at heart,
he's a traditionalist (with progressive views).
In the next cubicle, Jonson's snoring. And down
down and down by the boiler in the mail room
Donne's playing footsie with the hourlies.

At the office they'll notice his dreamy eyes, white
button-up shirts, cuffs rolled halfway to his elbows —
like he's about to get serious, maybe reach for an axe
to split a pile of wood. But they stay away. They know all
about Darling Buds, her picture pinned by his monitor.

Shakespeare is thinking of changing his name
to John because, *it's got a nice solid ring to it* —
Will seems so flimsy. So he goes down to the gym
three nights a week — most weeks... sometimes.
But keeps a red Nike gym bag packed below his desk.

Tonight though, Shakespeare's all business
at karaoke. He's hitting every high note from "*Without You*"
without any autotune — after he's had a few.
Something like tears shine in his eyes, and Ophelia
from Underwriting gently helps him to the El.

I imagine Shakespeare, alone,
fumbling for his keys in the dark,

scent of bourbon on his breath, shoos off Turtle
(his cat), picks his way in the dim light of half-opened
curtains. After crashing, by his bedside a year-old
perfumed letter: *Dear William, I am sorry, but...*

Saturdays, Shakespeare boards a train to the South Side.
His mother hardly remembers him. He fills her glass,
washes her feet, casts out the demons he sees. Later,
Shakespeare stands alone on the green-planked platform.
It is the last train of the night.

Shakespeare's been fiddling — under twilight —
in a new meter, to record the words of dolphins
from a dream, who cried, "*We are dying.*" All
while Turtle rests upon his window ledge,
watching the future unfold.

And his phone rings and it is Ophelia
from Underwriting who wanted to make sure,
Did you make it home alright Friday night?
And, *Okay — guess I'll see you Monday.* And,
Maybe you'd like to have lunch sometime?

Late at night Shakespeare rises,
finds a legal pad and pen
(for he leaves them everywhere).
Tells himself,
Only one quick edit this time, William.

Is still making
one-last-edit
as dawn rises,
his coffee gone cold.
Turtle, asleep, beside him.