

FROM MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING OF THE TRISTAN SOCIETY

James Cushing

Pretend you are driving to Wal-Mart.
The envelope in your passenger seat is full of cash;
a tall blond told them it was an answer
key to an important accounting exam
and you haven't been able to stop laughing.
Pretend you rise before dawn naturally, easily,
like a fawn in some not-too-distant forest,
accompanied by Beethoven's Sixth. A house waits
abandoned there, but you may not enter it.
Pretend you can: there they are, the set of
Charles Schultz books you grew up reading,
thick collections of blankets, jars, perfume
bottles, crayons, thrown-away things, full boxes
in every room. Pretend you feel no urge to cry
as you run your responsible, grown-up
errands: hospital, bank, bloodbank, hospice.

Now, stand in a parking lot and listen to the wind,
all of it, not just parts you like. Try to hear the continent's
voice burbling under the wind's lower
layers. Stand there, in a warm, hard wind.
Pretend night is a hula hoop, waiting to be
run over by your car, over and over, until it's flat.
Pretend Johnny Hodges is watching all this through
his creole calm, just about to mimic you on his alto.
He has no friends running for office this election,
and his playing somehow expresses that along with
something in the feel of a rubber ball bouncing
crazily through the LACMA courtyard in loops
the size of autumn. Now, put this chalice to your lips.
Pretend it's not the last thing left to do.