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Desiderium

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DESIDERIUM

MATTHEW OLZMANN

From across this great distance,
I'd like to give you: one cat.
I don't know much about cats but I like them
from a theoretical standpoint. The *idea* of cats.
The concept of cats. All that sleekness.
The engine purring. The green eyes.
Do cats have green eyes? Not a clue, but
I like the possibility of a green-eyed cat
tracking a mouse through the basement clutter
the way a government satellite or malignant god
watches its prey from above before pouncing.
I'd like to give you one of those.
Never mind that a cat is a cuddly apex predator
who would devour us if only it had larger fangs
and instead will satisfy that craving
by clawing its frustration into your sofa.
Relatedly, I'd love to give you one sofa. Mostly,
because I like the word sofa. It's a fantastic word,
just like amethyst, hippopotamus, and paperclip.
I'd like to give you those things as well, because
giving is evidence of friendship
and friendship is evidence of love.
Like the moon is evidence of gravity.

Like volcanos are evidence of tectonic plates,
pressure beneath the surface, desires
longing to no longer be contained.
The little receipts crumpled into your
coat pockets are evidence of groceries purchased
last November, and those receipts,
remaining in your pockets until the following autumn,
are evidence that you planned to think about them later.

In a time of sickness or separation,
when anxiety rearranges what we know
of our lives, it's easy to assume things will eventually
settle, go back to how they were. Like day becomes
night becomes day again. Like the song
on the radio is your favorite, then you hear
it too many times and it becomes sandpaper
in your ears until, years later, it arrives
while you're drinking Vesper martinis
in a hotel bar after interviewing for a job
you'll never get, and that song carries you
back to a time when you were young,
driving fast, and laughing. But believing
things can be like they once were
is like believing the toad can become
a tadpole again, or Michelangelo's David
can crawl back into the block of marble
and the marble can return itself to the quarry.

The last time I saw L_____, I didn't
think *Wow; this is the last time I will see L_____!*
In fact, we made plans. Those plans

became, *Can't wait to catch up!*
Became, *Sorry, I missed you.*
Became a funeral in July.
I don't know when
or if you and I will see each other again.

And what's left, after everything,
is this vase from your trip to Johannesburg.
This small stack of vinyl. These few photos.
The given things. A book
with your handwriting on a note inside,
saying, *Until soon* —