

ANNE RIESENBERG

Keep Moving

I.

A thought gets louder and louder
*if you want to be in charge of your
life you will have to pay your own
way the beginning of a plan a
kernel of self I will do this I will
figure out how to need no one*

I apply to a program in France I
will improve my tenses learn how
to teach I wear dangly earrings a
too-tight shirt to the interview six
mouths want to know my ambitions
*you must answer only in French —
il est tres important a moi de
habiter dans un pays etranger*

Etranger means foreign outsider
alien irrelevant

★

The blotchy theatrical guy in
Media Arts class confesses to
writing erotic poems about me asks
me out on a date *Les Enfants du
Paradis* is 163 supposedly sublime
sub-titled minutes of mimes
embodying ill-fated love

Before we meet I go to a party eat

brownies I realize too late have
been spiked Danny's wearing a
striped shirt and beret the mime
gestures passion Danny puts a damp
hand on my knee his nose looks
like an eel I can't see well enough
to read subtitles can't understand
actual people speaking French we
go to my apartment share a hesitant
kiss he undresses poses himself on
the bed brownies churn in my
stomach I must look sick he grabs
his clothes the brownies surge up

★

Shame is a punishing ghost I
don't get into the program decide
to drop out of school get a job
squeeze my neck until I can't
breathe

★

My sister calls says she's getting
married nothing fancy just family
at the ceremony *you have to come
help me deal with mom and dad*

★

My mother's wrapped herself in
something stretchy and taupe I
wear a flowery sundress my sister a
white satin sheath she and G get
married in front of the fireplace it's
the first time I've been with both

my mother and father in close to
eight years

In the photographs taken that day
the ones that include my parents
my sister and me we are smiling
and strangely out of focus as if the
film can't sustain our proximity

In my favorite my mother has
two mouths one joyful the other
slides off her face

★

No matter how haunted keep
moving keep moving

II.

I move to Boston get a
job in a university mailroom join a
household of five looking for six
cats activists decisions made by
consensus when they ask *tell us
about yourself* I say *I'm taking time
off from school want to be on my
own* fingers crossed no one notices
the rubble of me

★

R understands me gathers me into
her room she's running too had been
living on a yacht with her

boyfriend ball gowns celebrity
lunches willing to be his mistress
in exchange for a glamorous life
until he got jealous and tried to
choke her

R grew up Catholic strict in
Rhode Island oldest sister of seven
she tells me about the nuns about
her siblings dressed in pinafores
pink ribbons braided into raven-
black hair her mother's tired pride
father's closetful of dark suits she
draws to keep herself steady fine
inked images angel girls demons
floating in an exotic purgatorial
world we talk about the universe
about why things happen the way
they do

★

I recognize an urge to be well

★

Shakti calls herself a *Re-Birther* I
found her brochure at the co-op
she embraces me at the door

I am there to re-pattern my
negativity into abundance

She kneels next to me on the
futon tells me to accelerate my
breath that doing so will bring me
to the *hallowed threshold of*

emergence

She rubs my back hand circling
faster and faster I start to pant
my face goes numb sweat drips from
my pores

*Let your heart open let your
suffering go fill yourself with love
only love*

My lungs are straining too hot I
forgot to mention my asthma

Maybe asthmatics can't be reborn

★

I join a meditation group saffron
walls big Buddha in front of the
window shiny black floors I tuck
a cushion between my knees hands
in my lap a gong sounds then a
sweet voice *breathe deeply — all the
way in and — all the way out*

★

I see all the foreign films I can find

Join the museum hear Judy
Chicago lecture about *The Dinner
Party*

Circle the table hope repetition will
serve as a prayer bless you
paragons of female fortitude bless

you embroidered tablecloths bless
you ceramic vaginas

★

Share an eyes-lock-world-disappears
moment with the Burberry-scarfed
man in front of me in line at Dunkin'
Donuts

I want to sneak inside his
camelhair coat when he slips his
card into my palm I am pink

★

I call and agree to meet him the
following day it occurs to me as I
get off the bus I've made a
mistake I slow down lift into bird'-
eye detachment watch how I knock
on his door how it opens how I walk
in

★

Rumpled sweats the blue of his eyes
has gone flat he hands me coffee
starts yelling he's broke can't find a
job points to a door that can only
lead to his room

★

He tells me to take off my clothes lie
down on my stomach I hear the
plop of his pants as they land on

the rug give in to his weight on my
spine

He coaxes himself grandiose
words as if I'm not there I am
uninhabited gritty and gray as the
moon

He works long for reward pounds
the floor when he's through rolls to
the side like a stone

I wait till he sleeps slink out

Let myself breathe

★

Ribbons of air

Sunlight dazzles fresh falling snow I
am running through prisms of
water and fire

I am running into the arms of my life

Anne Riesenbergr grew up in St. Louis, holds an MFA from Lesley University, and won the 2016 *Blue Mesa Review* nonfiction contest. Her work recently appeared in *What Rough Beast*, *The Maine Review*, *The Blueshift Journal*, and *Naugatuck River Review*. She is a founding board member of Hewnoaks Artist Colony.