

# W H I S H

*Winner of the Press 53 Award for Poetry*

## **EXCERPTS**

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*Imaginary time is a new dimension,  
at right angles to ordinary, real time.*

— Stephen Hawking, 2002

**CLOCKS CAN'T BE TRUSTED IN THE ELECTRIC CITY.** Imposters stand on every corner, round faces mounted on bronze poles and stone facades. One announces 7:59, another some other time, gonging, gonging with such brass authority that 8:00 A.M. shivers and considers turning back. Between Erie Boulevard and Nott Terrace, a thousand moments, each false as a department store Santa. Cars whish by. Delivery trucks and the Crosstown Express. Groggy passengers gaze through frosted windows. The driver blinks at his watch, which claims to be 8:32. The bus blurs past the transit stop; the forgotten hour waits, smelling of coffee and lavender shampoo.

MANAGEMENT HAS HIRED THREE NEW SECONDS but they mangle every task. One flutters through ceiling vents, one twiddles with the computer fans, one calibrates the world's erratic rotation and jams the copy machine. Bookkeepers whisper about Pulse Frequency Drift. The coffee curdles. Management shrugs — adds a jiffy and a zeptohour. I slump at my desk and pretend the day is round.



FEDERATION AGENTS ASK  
WHETHER I'VE EVER BEEN MARRIED,  
and I have, but only a little bit, so brief  
it's easy to dismiss,  
like when you drop a blueberry and quickly snatch it up.  
Such a silly slip up (blink and you'd miss it)  
yet there's my married name, a tumble of *p*'s and *w*'s  
cascading from Deep Space Nine.  
It was the price of anchovies  
that messed us up, karaoke and pickleball,  
the in-laws messed us up, testosterone  
messed us up, wormholes, causality loops, and the war,  
everywhere garden pests  
and tesseracts, and why hold on  
to a floppy wedding veil?  
I gave the gown to a civic playhouse,  
thought I'd moved on, but now investigators  
from the Temporal Integrity Commission  
demand a name I almost forgot, and that dress,  
that ridiculous charmeuse dress,  
steps center stage,  
a walking shadow reciting Shakespeare —  
*What's done cannot be undone* —  
Oh my goodness, I'm wading barefoot in blueberries,  
so small, so indelible.

**HALF PAST YESTERDAY HAS ABANDONED ME.** I sulk in the rain-slicked plaza outside the computer repair shop and the delinquent hour doesn't come. Wind grips my umbrella; sleet stings my face. Half Past Yesterday doesn't call, email, or text. Telephone wires sag with crows too sodden to fly. The fleeting moment flies off to some island where mollusk shells lay thick as peanut brittle. Pining for Noon. Always pining for Noon. I slog through puddles, a statue learning to walk.



JUST FOR ONCE, I WANT TO WITNESS  
THE GOING AWAY. I want to catch the moment,  
cup it in my hands, see it blink like an altar candle.  
But in this dream, the Red Line shrieks from the terminal  
hours before I arrive. Or I reach Port Canaveral  
after the Boatswain's final call. I'm alone on the pier,  
waving goodbye, waving come back, waving  
until my watch slides from my wrist  
and tumbles into the foaming wake. I'm so thirsty —  
thirsty the way my father must have been  
in his hospice bed. I dab his mouth  
with a moist sponge. I tell him, Here I am,  
I'm right here. And so I am,  
except I turn to read the clock. I miss  
the instant he leaves. The Timex watch  
my mother gave me in high school  
*tsks* from the floor of the harbor —  
*Can't you be quicker?* —  
and I hear my husband tick.  
My sister lies on the kitchen floor.  
I pinch her nose, push air through her lips,  
yet I don't see her wish out to her garden,  
midnight dark and flecked with fireflies.  
I can never move fast enough —

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