

# Heather Altfeld

## *City Hall Epithalamium*

On the way to my wedding,  
I ride the 9 train alone, barreling through  
the rotted underbelly of Manhattan, trussed  
in a black velvet coat, nervous lilacs pinned  
to the pocket's edge. *There is earth here somewhere,*  
I tell myself,

digging my heels into the sticky floor, clenching  
the vile silver pole. 137<sup>th</sup> Street, City College,  
a barrel of black men with Eldridge Cleaver glasses  
step on, one slips his hand close to mine—I can feel  
his bad black energy, the tick of his cock, watch him smile  
at me and look at my feet. 125<sup>th</sup>, the African Good News  
Restaurant, peanut soup chalking up my throat,  
the small ting of the balaphone tingling on the platform.  
116<sup>th</sup>, Columbia, the Hasid scholars get on,  
hopped up on Maimonides and compote,  
their kippot nodding slightly forward,

fringe of their tefillin scattering like God's hairs  
around their waists. 110<sup>th</sup>, 103<sup>rd</sup>, 96<sup>th</sup>, the Westside  
hurries in, terriers in knitted sweaters,  
Zabar's bags. I am sweating. The lilac nods,  
sleepy, sullen against the dry velvet,  
86<sup>th</sup>, 79<sup>th</sup>, I am going to get off, skim beneath the turnstile,  
take the crosstown and heave into the trench of the private drive  
at the Met, wait for this March cold to simmer  
and be in the Rockies by sunup. 66<sup>th</sup> Street.  
They jam jar me against the window, push me up  
against the door  
like he'd push me up



against something when we first met, tree trunks,  
Japanese folding screens, the cold edge of a tub. 59<sup>th</sup> Street—  
I stand, complete with tiny inconspicuous parasite,  
steam against the sweated pulse of two bankers  
and a Beatles fan, slide into the fatted warmth of a vacant orange seat.  
49<sup>th</sup>, 42<sup>nd</sup>, 37<sup>th</sup>, and I won't touch him when I see him,

these are the last moments I have to hold out,  
to plane myself to the Coney Island local  
that is giving me ground, and power. 23<sup>rd</sup>, 14<sup>th</sup>,  
I wait on the platform, forty-five minutes  
until he arrives, those three blond hairs  
perched toward magnetic north,  
a daisy corsage in tissue, his ex-wife's favorite flower  
smelling of the Haggar slacks my father wore. We ride  
now, together, the hum of the tracks lulling me into the  
words, now, *sickness, health, death*, we are the last couple  
to chasten the bow  
of the mockwood podium, I kiss him,  
dry and stubborn, sewing myself  
to something I don't understand enough to want.