

## *Since February*

JAMES LONGENBACH

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### *Russ*

Your mother is driving you out of Texas,  
She's heading east on Route 10,  
The top is down, the wind is blowing through her hair.

Chattanooga? That was hours ago.  
Martinsburg, Harrisburg—  
You've never seen the ocean, you could see the ocean—

First stop, the Vermeers  
At the Metropolitan, gallery 638.  
Second, Maria Callas, seats in the parterre.

### *Mark*

Eyebrows raised as you uncorked the cognac, dishes cleared,  
The children screaming in the living room—  
*Grow old along with me.*

Eight years later resting on a bench  
In the Piazza Santo Spirito—  
*Getting old is not for sissies.*

You by the window overlooking the park at 91st Street,  
Unable to walk  
There, looking to read.

### *Wendy*

*Addio, per sempre addio, per sempre,*  
Sings Elisabetta to Don Carlo at the end of act five;  
*Per sempre*, sings the Don. Inevitably

This story ends, we had a train to make.  
Feet dangling beneath you,  
One of us hoisting you by your left arm, one of us by your right,

You flew down the Via Venti Settembre  
While the rest of us ran.  
Your beaming face.

### *Bianca*

Although we're standing on the icy wing of an airplane  
In the middle of the Hudson River,  
Nobody dies today.

Although the ruins of Palmyra have been ruined again,  
Ruins I saw first in *Life* magazine,  
I was a boy, summer of '72,

Nobody dies today. All we did  
Was leave the door open.  
And you disappeared.

*Sandy*

After the torchlight red on sweaty faces,  
The lectures and the arguments,  
The students listening politely in rows—

You with a bottle of chardonnay and a package of Ritz crackers  
Pinched from the reception.

*Meet you in my room!*

And a thousand years before that: you  
At the Academy, letting me sit  
In Edith Wharton's chair.

*Maureen*

I'm wearing the cardigan you sent me, the blue one;  
I saved the box in which it came.  
I'm walking across the park, I'm sitting

In brilliant sunshine on the steps of the museum, a taxi pulls up—  
Everybody's alive.

*Where is he exactly,*

You asked, unable to imagine  
A life alone.  
Where are you now?

*Russ*

A singer in the moment before he opens his mouth,  
Said Charles Anthony, who stood on the Met stage 2,928 times,  
Is the loneliest person in the world.

Love of words, mouths shaping words, your taste, equally exquisite,  
For the vulgar—I dreamt  
About a department meeting: there, primly

At a little desk, you were waiting.  
*What are you doing here?*  
*Where else*, you answered, *would I be?*