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Numberless

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Three Poems · *Heather McHugh*

NUMBERLESS

By law of rod
and cone, the closer it gets
the darker it looks. You look

benighted. I can hardly make out
elbow, lobe or nape, and once
we go into the whole

conundrum, it's by blind
feel, slowly summing
something's curve, some verb's
becoming, wound up where the room and all
its things are gone: the lampshade,
doorknob, chair — they've gone inside —
they've faded into eyelid, nipple, hip,
it isn't long before the world,
the world itself is gone

inside us, where an appetite is
humming, thumping, damp, and then
there's only inside left to lose, and then

that too is lost, all's
lost

in a drench, a
din, of
downfall,
voltage poured away
in brilliant paralyzing pulse . . .

Then four walls,

seven windows
reappear. Our shoes
show up, right where we left them, glasses
poised beside the bed, which led us into
such an indistinction: it now pulls apart
into the two of us, meiotic aftermath . . .
There is a ticking, there's
a cooling off. Come to my senses, I can see
nine inches from my face
the watched wrists fallen
on a pillow, side by side:
attached to different
beings in time:

one is a bracket of lidded silvers, fast asleep;
the other's open, strapped with hide . . .

THE WOMAN WHO LAUGHED ON CALVARY

Smilers, grinners,
smirkers, spinners
of wishes for nice
and nicer days: I didn't
laugh like you, who live for mere
amusement. The truth is
laughter's not

a mark of pleasure,
either intended or ex-,
no simple pleasantry outspread
or, smiling, rent: instead
it is the sign of a delirium,
spilt brain upon split
lip, an uncontainable
interiority—