

Jay Sizemore

HOW TO KNOW IF GOD EXISTS

There's so much to consider:
rain falling on one side of the street
for instance, or dust devils swirling
up in the gravel— harmless tornados.
There's time, always time,
hours a larva spends chewing holes
through a single birch leaf,
the fraction of a second
between bullet and skull,
a junebug's lonely drumming
along the side of a yellow house
built by hands turned to dirt
like the empty space a river
finds for a canyon.

I saw a man walk away
from an impossible crash,
his body pinned perfectly
between two tractor trailers,
his Grand Cherokee
a crumpled accordion
of aluminum foil
around such tender pale flesh,
he was a potato
ready for baking.

He smiled for the camera,
surveying the damage
with glass-eyed shock,
wondering if ghosts
could smell honeysuckle,
if the greens and blues of his world
had always felt so claustrophobic,
new dimensions jutting
from the scenery like fog—
wolves have better vision.

Sit still long enough
in a lightless cave
and the sound of blood
thrum-thrumming in your ears
will drive you insane.

A teenager wakes before dawn,

the scent of oil on his fingers.
He kills his mother.
They find her hours later,
still clad in plaid pajamas,
her face all but gone.
He then drives
to the school where she worked,
and tells twenty children
to line up in the hall
like they are going to recess,
tiny reflections on the tile
collapsing like unspooled yarn
after each shot.

The human genome
contains six billion DNA base pairs,
while an average adult body
holds seven *octillion* atoms,
every one of which
once part of an exploding star,
much older than planet Earth
or any living consciousness
capable of nostalgic wishes.

Imagine a universe
in which every atom
is a Lego block,
and every Lego block
is made of light.
Now, imagine building
a rose petal.
Imagine building a sun.

Imagine choosing which kites
get to fly,
and which get stuck in trees,
only instead of kites
they're Boeing 777's
climbing the stratosphere
to avoid a storm
somewhere over the Atlantic.

Imagine planning the trajectory
of every hail stone,
every drop of dew,
every pine needle
loosed from its limb—

Imagine never sleeping again.

When I was a child,
I was taught to listen
for that still small voice
speaking inside my heart.
I was taught that a man could live
for days in the belly of a whale.
I was told heaven collected souls
like a bucket left in the rain,
that dying meant rebirth
in a place without sadness,
where everything was perfect,
nothing hurt,
and the streets were purest gold.

But why then does the body
fight so hard to stay alive,
a shuddering gasp
in every slackening face?
Why should angels with white wings
worry about golden streets
in a world where walking
is itself obsolete?

It's like asking Death
to define what is beautiful.

Once the forest spoke to me
through the hisses
of leaves brushing against leaves.
The trees said everything
is either dirt or rain or light,
and that God is the breath
between them.

But I remember that morning,
before the twin towers fell—
those great pillars made of ash,
I saw a woman leap from a window,
her arms flailing wisps of flame
trying to catch the sky,
and I knew that God was the empty space
between her body and the ground.