

ELIZABETH LANGEMAK

Expectation

*I suffer all the time: I have no relief, no escape: it is monotony—
monotony—monotony—in pain.*

—Walt Whitman, in the week preceding his death

Walt Whitman, when I stood unmoved
at your tomb, I wondered, then, what place

might move me. I read the plaque
but you were not in the grass. I touched

the moss and still you stonewalled
from inside your barred hole in the hill,

from your casket stacked up
with your kinfolk. Like a pebble

dropped into stale waters, your death
rung out others: around the cemetery

the gray hospitals, pale office buildings,
then chop shops and shacks with their

flagging dispositions, paint shattered
on panes, cast-off condoms and careless

tires. To be invisible is to barely be,
and so Camden becomes, with you

lodged at its heart in your reluctant
sublime, your drunken embrace

become hangover, your tickled palm
turned itch. In your quiet park

on that sweated morning, I knew
what you meant by monotony, I felt

the old expectation, the wanting
of wanting, I suffered for lack of better

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pains, and from this there is no relief
either. But also hear this: just as sure

as each breath beat its path from your lungs
as it beats now from mine, as you are

bones in a box as I stand in my skin,
as we both should have known

you would not wait at this place,
hear how my voice has the gait

of a woman who wanted something
better. And is not afraid to ask.