

Columbia

by Erika Hodges

an honest letter
a juicing of daylight
a knock at the fence
around the nunnery across
the street you are gone
you are listening to her play
they brought guns you said
that is missouri i said
it was nice to
tell someone who cared
but would stay
calm and so i stayed
calm and changed
the subject, told you
about my new allergist, the
nunnery with the disco ball
you said it was nice to
have a friend like me and i
said you know, i never thought
this was something other than
friendship, yet maybe
that was the ocean
when the driver dropped me
in the middle
of the highway and i had to crawl
through bramble to meet you
you had already moved
the blanket so i would see you
right away and then you kissed
me right away, i was ready
to go into the ocean and
this is an easy place to be, the
ocean that is never my friend
but always consistent will
always be stronger will
always knock me will always
float me because this, this
is the last warm day
of the year, the last day i can
skip out early and take the A
all the way, all the way to the
queer beach with the

leather dicks that don't
want me / you want
me, that is a present
fact but never a future
this is how we want it
how we made it and my
mother is not the kind of
mother to ask about
marriage or babies, dogs
hate her, but she is the
kind of mother to sniff
out a hesitancy and exploit
it and that that is how i
learned about lying as a
way to make space for
yourself but this
is an honest letter, and
here is an accounting
of what might be
if my edges start
deteriorating like thread
around old pockets, out like
worms and change falling
through yet entering in
my balance to the
calculator every second or

third day, the total amount
divided by four, the number
of months until my next
loan,
adding in any expected work
that may come thru but i
have to see the doctor
so maybe they will give
the work to someone else,
divided by four, minus rent
minus phone minus utilities
minus train minus food
minus credit card, minus a
certain number something
always happens some
emergency someone gets
arrested, then that number
divided by 31 and that is my
daily number, and
sometimes

i can buy a coffee and
sometimes i cannot and
this is what an honest letter
looks like, my world filled with
calculations and an oceanic
reprieve and no time for rage
which one might say is giving
up but i haven't worried
about that in so long, have
only been spending my time
juicing the daylight and looking
for a fair price on salt and
making sure you know how
to handle yourself around guns
which is different than
handling guns, i can teach you
that too, it takes me two to three
days to recover but that is also
two to three days not out in the
world where i would spend my
daily number and so maybe
that is a blessing, you
could go to missouri and
i would stay here and you
would know, eye contact,
breathe out, castle law,
cup the bottom for
stability, shoulders down,
no ocean in missouri,
no reprieve, but forest
and lovers and instead
of this electric kettle,
painting red, blue, it
is landscape and a
creased face, dead life
from nothing to the
root of the tongue