

SEMANTICS

I'm prompted to summarize you
and before I get anywhere the concept
blunders its way through my teeth,
a lie, contends I'm implying away

our fleshy nuance, that I would
spouse us if I were serious
or *partner* you if I mean to evade
marriage, or monogamy.

I *lover* you in heterosexual company
and it erases the scars we've become
for each other. How do I comprise you
and you and you and who

we each *darling* next without saying *us*
and *all our genderqueer heartthrobs* every time?
I have no perfect answer, but at intake
I tell the nurse *Emil*— my lover

and partner and unmarried husband and never
my only of anything, who will, when I call
tonight from the opposite coast, cup my elbows
through the phone to soften a small edge

of me as I lean into preparatory grief, who, when
I arrive, forever, from the last flight
of the California adventure, will roll
me a blunt, uncork a bottle of prosecco, ferries

me directly to the Atlantic, which I *darling'd*
first and stay adoring, though it is not
the only or final ocean
I love, or will.

JAMES
MERENDA