

ODE TO HUGGING

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It's true as a child I wore a stuffed bear to emaciation, until her coat pillled like a favorite sweater. I can stand to be held at least twenty seconds, in other words at this point in the poem we'd still be hugging. Endear me. Cherish me. Hedge me like a garden. I miss my mother's, amniotic, her seventy-seven streams and a faulty valve. Repair me. Mend me like my friend S with her trademark lift-off version, or my friend M with her wet shampooed hair, how she smells of spiced tea, chocolate. Oxytocin me. Right-hemispheric-emotional-process me. My father's gone, but his Percocet words still break, *It'll be okay*, a consolation wobbly as his cane. I used to find my brother, now frontline healthcare worker, open smile, arms perpendicular as a scarecrow singing my name. Lower my pressure. Allow me further. if you're familiar with nature's

reciprocity, I put my arms around my partner, and we are beech trees grown together, water slow-moving on the lake. I've been floating. I rest my chin for the living and how many of the millions of souls who could not be together at the end, in the year of no hugging. I'll meet you. Left-lean you. We're linked if you perceive the imperceptible shift in a house plant, its long leaves bending toward the sun and away from gravity. Every day, we're falling. Hug as a child would. Who will you greet in the foyer or from friendship's revolving door? You could be tendrils spiraling fingers tight as a ball point pen spring that if it could talk would say: let's go, we're losing time, this blanket is only so weighted, and the warm length of the dog is unpredictable. Stand for the grounded body human. Touch hunger, touch skin.

