OTHER PEOPLE

By Dan Rosenberg

When the birds whistle from their nests of pink insulation, they're between neighbors & roommates. When mold starts growing in the jelly jar, it stops being a jelly jar. Now it's a home. And us? We're just watching the soft tendrils of dawn spill over the sky. Somewhere in the drinking it stopped being yesterday. We've kept our eyes open all through the dark, & we still don't see any strangers' faces in our own.

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When the pinecones have been collected, what then? Then we have the pinecones—isn't that enough? I also have some worries crashing over the levees in my guts, but when I hold my head in my hands & twist, my vertebrae crack, & I feel briefly awake to my body's thousands of small voices. I'm a city over here, & sure, maybe I'm in some kind of peril, but you're helicoptering in. Thanks for all these water bottles, friend. Let's start a collection.

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When the running hurts, I stop running. When you hurt, I huddle with you before a curio cabinet stuffed with animal masks & *The Book of Our Heritage* volumes 1-3. The lights will turn off without us, eventually. When the family is big enough, there won't be any strangers. We will hold each other & remember the birds, their many hellos. I'd take a footpath laced with fire ants over a highway. Let's not be anybody's terror in the world. When I hold my own hands, it looks like wringing. Help me be clear, friend. When a stranger offers you a drink, drink if you want to. The world is not malevolent. It brims with shy smiles. When a stranger moves in, be no stranger to her. Or at least give it a try. When a door won't open, sure, it might be a wall. But go ahead & walk through anyway.

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