

Ninety-eight Degrees by Lynn Wagner

My tongue an iris bent low to your body,
stem whitening in the crease.
To be broken like that, having

green bleed away so that by June
the flower's gone, succumb
to summer heat, long-sleeved

leaves no longer praising. You roll
to your side of the bed.
Noon. So hot I put on

jazz. Holiday singing *Summertime*
and the living is . . . but it's
nowhere near easy. Listen,

the mourning doves outside my window
each day repeat their blues,
a low breathing: in /

out / in. Then out, out, out. They know
that death sits with them, there
on the telephone wire.

I reach for your hand and admire the way
your thumb covers my knuckles,
pulling me along. *The world*

is too much with us, baby, late and soon—that's
the way you sing it when you bend down
close to me. Abandoned

this body would dissolve in water in less than
a decade, half that if it were summer
all the time. I can't save myself

in the dark boat of your love. If it were dusk
there'd be some relief from this heat. I'm waiting
for the rinse of afterglow

to sooth the sky. For songbirds
to finally tuck closed beaks
beneath their wings. You don't believe

the branches move at all in this haze
but I tell you they do. I tell you
the wires will soon send signals into

separate houses and each television's
wide box of moving blue, in time,
will kiss to a single white star

and with a hum and a crinkle go out. I'm waiting
for that. Not the darkness but the hum.
When I called out God, it was

a different kind of prayer. When I said go,
I meant take me. Summer
has settled into this city, two

tiger lilies grow near the wall. The smaller one
tipped up to a satellite dish, or maybe
it's the moon. While

the head of the other bows a little lower.

