

On Your Birthday, Four Months After Your Death

Yes, she held the phone to your ear and
we heard you breathing, hard
and quick, as if someone were pushing your chest,
as if a pump forced you to breathe. And we
talked, as if you could hear us, as if
you understood why our voices came
through the hard plastic instrument, as if you
knew anymore what a phone was. Years ago
I stood in my living room, listening
through the phone to Greek songs you played
and we danced—you in New York, me in Boston—you coaching
me through the traditional dances—step, cross back,
three steps, kick: the *kalamatianó*—memory in my feet, each of us
sliding across the floor, cradling the phone, you
saying, *yes, yes that's it*. This
before my wedding, where, when the *bouzouki* sounded,
high-pitched, nasal, you leaped and stamped, whirled
mid-air, led the circle of dancers—hiss and *ooph!*
That day I carried the phalaenopsis, the pure
white, the moth orchid, rush
of white water, filament of wings, and everything
seemed possible, the radiant
silk of that horizon, as if the arc
the orchid traced could map the world,
as if we knew at all what lay ahead. Now
I will place you there, Costa, where
I want to sleep, on the orchid's plush cheek,
three petals curved, phalaenopsis, most beautiful,
the orchid's white tongue, they say: the world
is calm and just, they say: there is no end to beauty,
they say: everything is possible,
oh sweet wild scarf of white, swirl of velvet water, let me
lay my friend there, yes, I will place you there, Costa,
curled and sleeping.