

Timothy Liu

Elegy

Last week your brother died, and today
you're jumping off a tower ninety feet
higher than before, bungee cords tied
around your ankles. You said it felt
safe. Peter died, your mother staring
at what was left of his life. His lover
slept in a chair. So many false alarms
in the past four years, but the worst
came early—dead at twenty-eight.
In high school, his friends came over
for sex in the room next to yours
while we sat on a single bed listening
to Queen: *Oh we are the champions
my friends, and we'll keep on fighting
till the end.* Music was our denial
for what we had not lived while men
came and went. Last week you came
ten feet from hitting the ground—
it happens all the time. His funeral
was louder than an Irish wake, everyone
blitzed. No one mentioned AIDS. As if
shame, like a family friend invited
not to speak, had nothing else to do
but party. Had there been more rage
at the flames that licked each cell
of his body clean, the genitals reduced
to cinders, all evidence of his life
destroyed, I might have believed he died
in honor—no need to write this elegy.

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