

How to Remember

by Katie Johnson

On the coffee table is a yellow notepad;
take it. Claim it as your own.

Write down all the things you can't remember.

Write the grocery lists, the phone numbers,
the addresses, the important messages.

Write the names of the people you love.

Write their professions.

Write their likes and dislikes.

Write their faces before they blur and run
like chalk in the rain of your memory.

Write your daughters.

Write your ex-wife, that bitch.

Write how she ruined everything.

Leave out how she loved you.

Leave out the private jokes,
the way she laughed when you showered in the rain,
the dog you kept a secret
when you lived in that tiny apartment together.

Write your mother,
but omit the way her eyes have changed.

Do not wonder why.

Do not write how your traitorous legs would not hold you,
how your mutinous liver would no longer filter the waste from
your blood.

Do not write how long it has been
since you have seen your family,
since you had a family.

Do not write how your skin has become the yellow of that paper,
how the blue lines have begun to match

those fragile veins the color of winter on the back of your hands,
which seem to map out the Indian Trails you once explored
in a childhood you can no longer remember.

It is too late to write them,
to cradle them on paper the way your mind no longer can.

Put down your pen.

Read.

Swallow the tears that fall and smear the ink,
obliterating the words you have already forgotten.