

Rumor

AVIYA KUSHNER

There's a crazy man in the hills,
howling that he can comfort us all.
There's an old crazy man in all of us,
saying I raised you, made you tall,
and you—you rebellious little wuss,
you forgot that an ox knows who owns
him, an ass knows his place. Rain falls
and we blame God, the way our ancestors
blamed. Bombs explode in a faraway
city where I once lived, and the world rains
its curses on man, on God, when he said
I will be what I will be, I am what I am.
forget tenses because I am past and present
and future, and I breathed you
into you. Listen—I am comforting
you, breathing through Isaiah.
In a few years you will be just rumor,
a fire, dry grass. Like the tale of an old
crazy man in the hills, a story everyone claims:
a balm to the crazy, the rebel, the wuss,
Isaiah to the nations of the earth.

Isaiah 1:2–3.

New York

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Ask yourselves why you are lying there, far under
the ruins of subway, beneath gray dust of human bone,
in the stench of airplane fuel, rotted teeth, useless paper.
Over many waters, they came to do this to you.
Now what is it that you have done? Isaiah would say
belief has left you, but I am not sure about that, here in the cool
blackness of what once was the building in which I bought
my first stock. Of course stock does not
matter, nor the companies of the day, only the caught
and their howls and moans, the whispered beliefs of the naked
there in the rubble, where the question of prophecy rumbles in bellies.
Earth totters, crumbles: and the dead leave us to wonder, again, in God.
Isaiah, Chapter 23