

So the Student Says, He Who Skips Our Conference and Wants a New Meeting Time

by Paige Riehl

*No excuses here. I'm at fault, he says. Job's hell and life's a narrow path.
Work late, sleep late. No writing to show, he's gum-snapping,*

looking for another break. All these students with their colorful beanies,
the way their shoulders lean into February. *Okay, I say.*

One forgets to read the assigned text and throws a desk against the wall.
He exits into some endless hallway never to return.

Another says she responds to many names, doesn't know who
will attend class in her body. Calls herself *we*.

One stumbles into my office clutching paragraphs. Together we deconstruct
and reconstruct nonsensical sentences like vascular surgeons.

Others bide their time. Filmy eyes and crossed legs. Phones
buzz important in pockets. No questions. But today, he who skips conferences

signs up for a new time tomorrow. He talks through my bathroom break.
He is trying, is overextended, hopes I see the effort. My tired brain. My full bladder.

Little lightning streaks flash across my vision—ocular migraine—
the body's warning flashes above a churning sea. *See ya tomorrow, he says.*

*Okay, I say—to the flying desk, the lightning, the buzzing pockets,
the churning sea, the empty hallway. Tomorrow: okay.*

Paige Riehl's poetry chapbook, Blood Ties, was recently published by Finishing Line Press, and her work also has appeared in publications that include Meridian, Potomac Review, and South Dakota Review. She was selected by poets Jude Nutter and Oliver de la Paz as a winner of the 2012-2013 Loft Mentor Series in Poetry in Minneapolis. Riehl is a full-time English faculty member at Anoka-Ramsey Community College in Minnesota.

