

YES

For Brett Roger Wood, d. March 3, 1987

My best friend appeared at the door
during dinner – so pleased,
I mistook her face, which said more
than anything. I prattled on and teased

stupidly until she stopped me cold
and told me you were dead. *How? Why?*
A day before, you had taken hold
of me and wouldn't let go, try

as I might to pry your grip that held tight
as a drowning man, caught by the tide,
grasps for a hand. Was it spite
for all the years our desks were side by side

–Wood was always next after White–
that I gently but firmly pushed you away?
(I'm not saying I'm the one who might
have saved you; could I have met halfway?)

I was nearby, and it was me
you turned to.) Is this also why,
when you bravely called to see
if we could meet up for a date, I

thought of how you greeted me each day—
your remark that smarted like a stone—
and so I said *No?* Perhaps I'll lay
blame on the times; the culture's tone

then was every man for himself.
A generation's reprieve,
and all that matters to me is love.
All those books on my shelf—

the words might as well be made of rock
(pages compressed with time,
lined in bands of crisscrossed rhyme,
a residue of life that's past)—the clock

won't stop. If I could cast these lines
across the space where you broke free
and I went on—pull you from the rough sea
that swallows all in its confines—

I would hold on, my answer slow.
If I could hear again your nervous voice,
this time I'd make a different choice,
say, *YES. Where would you like to go?*

~ Rachel White