

Finalist, Poetry

To Be Happy
By Leah Angstman

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*(Anne Gray Sexton, November 9, 1928 – October 4, 1974;
Suicide by carbon monoxide poisoning, after locking herself in her garage
with the car engine running, following complications from manic depression
and then-undiagnosed bipolar disorder)*

Definitions cling to pages of textbooks,
encyclopedic editions, like mania can cling to a head.
“What is it to be happy?” a poet will sometimes ask,
identifying flowers, seeking the mountaintop,
grazing the valley’s edge, bent ear to seashell,
smiling at giddy child, kestrel-looming over the
desired ends, the means, the punctuation so often
thrown around in a crown of exclamation points.

Happy! So happy!
To have learned this definition requires patience,
bestowed only to the weak. To have known happiness
means unpossessing the knowledge to
have ever known madness—its encompassing—
its narrow, dark tunnel to a fracture of light at the end.

Could be the beacon of an exit.
Could merely be the approaching light
of another goddamned train.