

Allison Joseph

NOTEBOOKS

What good are notebooks?

—Talking Heads, “Life During Wartime”

I crave them as if craving something carnal,
blankness of pages erotic, clean with sensual
possibilities and ready to be dampened
by my insistent ink, swirls of language

made plain on thin blue lines taut
as tightrope. I collect them like other women
collect shoes or boyfriends, fingering pristine
pages while standing hushed in aisles

of bookstores and stationery shops,
stroking plush-covered ones with a single
finger, loving floral-print ones more
than actual flowers, needing another and

another until my house is overrun
with them, and they start arranging
cocktail hours and support groups—
for the ones I have not written in

grow lonely, and the ones managing
the burden of my desperate handwriting
need someone to talk to, peers to confide in
about these dog-eared secrets and semi-scribbled

imaginings, covert half-truths, outright lies.
How they congregate around my bed,
waiting for me to pick one up, start
another hazy page of scrawls and arrows,

cross-outs and restarts, confessions
that will never be confessions until
I judge them fit for judgment. Sometimes
when fate has flattened me with its one



hard fist, only the black-and-white
composition notebooks of childhood
will do, marbled covers unchanged
from when I first learned cursive—

one letter reaching for the next
in the crazy tilting of my untested hand.
Only those wide-ruled lines will do,
those patient beginnings.

