

Private Cities

Mandy Sutter

Midnight. Two friends smoked,
hanging out the window of the Doris Birdsall block
where even ordinary cigarettes were forbidden.

One had come all the way from Aberdeen
for the other's twenty-first. They tried to sleep;
gave up. They'd open a brand new hair salon

run it together. But what to call it?
Already there were names like Mane Attraction
Deb 'n' Hair and Have it Off

They lurched around the room. One rummaged
in the other's sponge bag. I've got it. Courtesy Shower Cap.
It wasn't funny. They laughed themselves silly.

That joke lived on
longer than the salon idea
longer than the friendship.

This city's not built
of bricks and stone,
nor landscape, dialect, weather.

No, once the architect and his ten men have left,
memory slowly builds another set of houses, streets and squares
that no-one will ever see but you.

