

UNDOING

What follows is an essay about the undoing of an anthropologist who was undone alongside a woman he knew, or tried to know. It is the record of an ending; a test of what one can say or do in the aftermath of an end. She was ill; those around her were ill. He attempted in a small but purposeful way to record the moments in which she unraveled, physically and psychically, and rarer moments when she pulled together. Years passed. The relationship soured. Time is central to this story but not to its length—moments are indiscriminate, shaken from their place along a

continuum. Still, it took him a long time to recognize the accumulation of failure. He says this knowing just how phony it must sound. And he may be a phony, but not a modest one. Modesty has no value for the anthropologist, whose discipline requires him to perform virtue and assert truth even while claiming uncertainty and worry. There is certainty here and the wholeness of ruination.

Boo hiss, the final word offers such little satisfaction.

The inventory of minor happenings in the other global South.¹

A career in the human sciences made in a hollow space.