

Layabout

By John Brehm

Do nothing and everything will be done,
that's what Mr. Lao Tzu said, who walked
around talking 2,500 years ago and

now his books practically grow on trees
they're so popular and if he were
alive today beautiful women would

rush up to him like waves lapping
at the shores of his wisdom.
That's the way it is, I guess: humbling.

But if I could just unclench my fists,
empty out my eyes, turn my mind into
a prayer flag for the wind to play with,

we could be brothers, him the older one
who's seen and not done it all and me
still unlearning, both of us slung low

in our hammocks, our hats tipped
forwards, hands folded neatly,
like bamboo huts, above our hearts.

Source: Poetry (Poetry Foundation, 2001)



John Brehm was born in Lincoln, Nebraska, and educated at the University of Nebraska and Cornell University. He lives in Portland, Oregon, and teaches at Oregon Literary Arts and Mountain Writers Series in Portland, and at Lighthouse Writers Workshop in Denver, Colorado.