

Narrow Field

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## Contents

(1)

Neither had the Creatures Taught Them Anything Bad	5
The Stresses Involved in Landing and Taking Off	6
Repeating the Alarm	7
The Glass	9
Strays in Christ King (Misiones, Argentina)	10
**	11
Family of Four, Family of Three	12
The Dumb Room	16
Hauser in Ansbach	17
Arcadia, California, 1970, Blue	18
Eclampsia	20

(2)

Tear It Down	22
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(3)

Raised By Wolves	38
Standing Under the Pivot	40
Build Me Up	43
More of the Same	45
Autologous and Caul	46
Rolling Hills	48
White Woman Bottoms (Southwest, Kansas)	49
**	50
**	51
No One Waits	52
Some Terrible Thing	53

**(1)**

## Neither had the Creatures Taught Them Anything Bad

Singh's box camera catches everything.  
A foot. The salve. His wife's tiny hands.  
The first time the older girl stands.

One foot, the other.

The camera captures motion.  
Could be a tree branch or anything.  
Singh and his wife recognize the dirt floor.

*Here*, one will tap to the other. Knowingly, *here*.

The small one screams when touched.  
*Then leave her there.*

They sleep like thin spoons.  
The older cradles her young little wolf.  
No hands on anywhere, pulls her head in  
with the crook of her arm, stares into the camera.  
Defiant or else feeling nothing  
or else watching the black and glass shine in the good doctor's hand.

After a time the older girl learns colors  
and the young one dies of a kidney infection.  
For two days after, the one left lay still,  
arms empty, eyes dry.

"Isn't it too much?"  
The camera clicks.  
And then again.

In the jungle another rifle goes off.

## **The Stresses Involved in Landing and Taking Off**

*When you start talking to him, he chirps.* –Galina Volskaya (Social Worker)

The large keel or sternum of a flying bird will lose definition when the said bird is caged.

People he is not surprised to see; the cameras delight him.

Extra neck bones are useful for getting your mouth to places you do not want to take your whole body, like the bottom of a pond.

The boy scratches in newspaper, his nose to the ground.

Major limb bones are hollow with internal struts, but the leg bones are heavy.

The boy stays low to the ground.

The flightless lifestyle: better balance in bipedal locomotion.

The boy sleeps crouched in a corner between perches, between the African Grey and the Eclectus who sometimes moves to his shoulder, wakes him up with a tug on his hair.

The wing is composed of modified hand bones.

Because she does not clip them, mornings in the room are wild with flight. The boy too will flap what he has.

The edges of the bill are especially hard, are called tomia or (singular) tomium.

With teeth, the boy moves suet to sill, but never looks out.

The window means more to the birds.

Head and beak dart back and forth between the outside and in.

When excited they flap at the glass. The woman cleans streaks there on Sundays.

Short thin bills are for insect eaters, short thick bills for seeds, long thin bills for probing soft mud.

The things he will learn when he has language. The *anas acuta* of the duck, the *hemignathus wilsoni* of the akaipolaau. Commissure of the hinge. Distal and proximal, the primary coverts. Contour, down, and semiplume, filoplume, bristle, and powder.

## Repeating the Alarm

*...when he sings he has the most wonderful voice.* —Hillary Cook, dentist

The neighbor's house is an empire  
and the empire is shut tight tonight.  
And all the lights are off  
in the empire and all the doors are locked  
keeping everything imperial inside, where it

leans toward the window  
unseen.

The monkeys scream in the trees,  
green vervet complete their circle of noise in the leaves.  
Leaves shake down  
and they stay in the trees.

The boy's dark skin is worn  
white at the knees.  
The empire has him tied to a bed.  
Teeth cracked from bark and bone,  
tough love, the sinewed arms.  
A light coat of fur covers his chest  
and his back.

The boy cannot eat stew or any cooked food.  
Yet he fingers fork tines, fingers a spoon.  
The boy cannot stand upright  
without the help of a chair or the stump in the yard  
or the girl who talks soft  
and knows not to look in his eyes.

When the boy removes clothing  
and pisses in dirt  
the dust rises  
and the empire closes its arms.  
Gives back the pants,  
cooks the food.  
The boy learns to straighten his legs,  
let loose of the stump, the chair,  
but never the girl.  
Until their eyes meet.

Empire teaches him “pot,”  
teaches him “pan.”  
The monkeys scream in the trees.

Empire fixes teeth,  
gives the boy voice,  
and a guitar.  
He goes on tour standing upright,  
he goes on tour and he sings.

## The Glass

What the deadbolt said was  
nothing more than history.

Lamplight sputtered  
on an old wood floor—made it

the color thieves wore  
when winter came:

tar black and backward  
tan into grey.

Soft black of ash  
that covered everything.

“I am not going to die this way,”  
the young man said to no one.

He was taught to talk to him  
as one would talk to God,

though no one said it like that,  
only that he should be on his knees.

“It will be cars that kill me. Or *a* car.”  
But he did not remember what they looked like.

Only that he’d dreamed once,  
of the glass all crashing in.

**Strays in Christ King** (Misiones, Argentina)

The molly hacks and slinks unmuzzled,  
mewls through gutter muck,

dragging wrapped candy  
and a gummed muffin.

Rainwater creases hackles,  
damp knives the will to fight got right.

The pack of them shuffle, taut claws  
across broken brick, saxifrage.

To cover what wails  
in newspaper and craft scraps:

Slick flense in the cutwater,  
a baby, cat-sized:

Someone's son brought over the break,  
some bough low on seawall.

The glaring can't move him,  
but they can halt his roll, keep him warm.

Where he crawls they follow,  
knees glass-wrecked and dirty.

With a lilt he's collared,  
hair tugged, bottom prodded.

The cats lie back and stare.  
They hiss and spit at strangers.

*The faded ladybug thermometer  
reads 103.*

*It's morning, 10am.*

*Hot dust blows crackles  
against the house's tiny side, erases  
the tracks of mom's Mustang.*

*Rattling whir of the a/c box in the window,  
next door Miss Dot is a nautilus blur in her living room,  
her TV on Donahue.*

## Family of Four, Family of Three

Some animals require  
very little light  
or oxygen to thrive.

Take nematodes,  
those long  
pale eels with skin  
so see-through thin  
that one can witness organs,  
working.

The thudding  
of their skysick hearts  
and early  
worthless  
brains.

\*

The boy stops on his bike,  
looks at the sun in the pond.

The nests of birds in skeletal trees  
with buds just pushing out.

\*

There is a girl in a basement  
only a mile from here.

No one can hear her scream.

There is no scream.  
She doesn't know to scream.

\*

Someone's sister missed.

One shoe still  
in the yard.

Pink,  
still tied.

\*

Long thin switch from the bank of the pond.  
Razor grass and raw weed.

\*

Schematic drawing of a male nematode: **1** mouth opening, **2** intestine, **3** cloacal opening, **4** organ of excretion, **5** testis, **6** circumpharyngeal ring of nervous system, **7** dorsal trunk of nervous system, **8** ventral trunk of nervous system, **9** excretion pore.

\*

Cuts the boy's back  
and the hands that tried to catch it.

\*

He didn't see the car.

Only heard it idle.

\*

The boy takes off his shirt, his pants.  
The boy takes off his socks and underwear.

He sits in mud, slowly

stretches out lengthwise.

\*

One eye open, the other eye closed.  
Mud and water, water and sky.

\*

The chair was there.  
The bowl below it.

Knock into it at night.  
What water sounds like in the dark.

Is wind, starts up. Or stops.  
It could be wind. Could be household machinery.

\*

Even thieves must do the dishes,  
do the laundry.  
Sweep the floor.

Hush of broom on hard of wood.

\*

She hears that, pretends  
it's whispers.

\*

The sun sets to the pond's side.  
Mud releases air,  
one minute bubble  
after the other.

Like a clock tick.

The mud releases him, and so  
he turns toward home.

\*

The chair was there when she was ready,  
straw mattress, mute piano.

Moon releases lowly hums  
the girl can feel through walls.

## The Dumb Room

He touches his toes for practice,  
to stay limber.

Stands against the wall.

A flat hand pressed against the top of his head,  
flattens his hair.

Fingers touch wall.  
He pushes his middle fingernail

into the wall's soft give. Leaves a mark.  
A sign of feeling. The mark is the same as it was last month.

On the back of the door—  
How can it be the back if this side's all he's ever seen?

The door will open when the room is dark.

There is no light out there either,  
only a slip of sound, some low hum.

On the back of the door he raps.  
There is no echo. He raps again.

Dead sound in the dumb room.  
Walls still rectangles.

Eleven foot, heel to toe,  
by seven. Same story.

He raps on the door 28 times.  
No clue what the month is,

he goes by the moon, which never disappoints,  
stays the same in its changing.

## Hauser in Ansbach

There is tumult in the sky, *krach machen*. The afternoon is falling into night. It's winter, cold. The sky wants to be so slow, but isn't. Isn't quiet either. The cloud blinks loud with fast wing, *schnell flügel*, what the manboy called the rotor blade on looking up, a whirring that stirs the hair and the feathers and branches and trees. Some father (not his, though no one knows) cradles his pointing hand, brings it down.

There is no pointing here.

There is a reaching in underbrush, the rush of games on straw, wet sand, cleared rivulets on concrete, toy horse missing one long limb, but still allowed to stand. A boy in chains. Only the smoky sky and the birdsong. Only smoky sky and leaves clapping softly.

A note in the manboy's fist. He stands on the courthouse steps in short pants, full beard and a dream of pferd, a herd of pferd. "I want to be a Reiter, like my Vater," says the manboy. Soon they will dress him in fine silk and let him grow claws. They will give him horse. Only the moon will be legless and unrideable.

## Arcadia, California, 1970, Blue

Genie bunny walks to the mailbox,  
when she gets out.  
She sharpens her claws.  
Genie wears beads and buttons way up;  
way up, she tightens her hair.  
Genie's lip sticks out, but she doesn't  
know pout from a frown.  
Only good and bad, which come  
from Da's hands, bad,  
Da's gun, good.  
Then he won't get up from his chair.

Genie's cardigan hangs loose over her schoolgirl plaid.  
She straightens her walk, slouches,  
straightens her walk,  
bunny her fists in the air.

She spits and she sniffs and she claws.

Doctor promises sun and cookies,  
but it's all the same to her.  
"Round," she says and takes a swipe at the sky  
through her narrow window.  
"Round," she says and points out at the blue.

Her brother was burning leaves one by one in the yard,  
and this was called normal because he had speech,  
could name all the things he destroyed.

Our mouths were made for movement.  
Rare steak staining the floor, a memory  
of shouting, of the TV up loud.  
A memory of red marks on the floor and the blue,  
blue flickering of the wall.  
She doesn't know the word for ocean, or for memory,  
TV, only doctor, only chair.  
Seagulls on the screen she calls "caw"  
and her arms flit like that,  
hands pick out spots on the screen.  
Bring the close stool and it's not fought,  
a flat knot; not remembering,  
she's there.  
And the girl disappears from her eyes,

bunny not knot,  
to the window,  
wrists tight to her sides,  
hair in her face,  
a stain on the floor.

“Blue,”

she whispers, which is the color  
night was once,  
on the wall,  
the color not clouds in the sky.

“Clouds,” she can say. “White,” she can say.

“Doctor,” she says,

“Blue.”

Her back to the chair.

“Blue,” now

picking out cars in the lot.

## Eclampsia

Progeny! Baby girl born on a hot table in the center of a room. Placental abruption; sun-filled Sunday and all hearths and couches heating up in the houses around.

Call her something; make a name. Yesterday it was “spring-like,” “reckless.” After the accident, in the in-between under stoplight, cracked glass and blue smoke, we called her “devil”; the name will stick. Stilled brother with blood on his head.

I spent the morning lost in wonder. The power of naming, of beginning an end. Brother will call her “woofer” and “woo-bess,” all mongrel and cry.

The neighbors will never know her real name, only what we tell them. Appellation! A haunting, sun-filled table slick-wet. Abject hazel, a hellcat, eclat, lichen ablaze or cleanable zen, botanical, the jet zone, or the hole tin, nonsense in lenient cabal, banal ethic, acanthi noble, acanthi bone. – all nonsense.

But, my child, oh my child! what else can I tell? what else can I say of how she came to be?

**(2)**

## Tear It Down

Yesterday I saw a woodpecker whittling a wood door.

\*

Sometimes I knock to come in.

\*

Today I saw two twigs of purple lilac with my house key, three would make it odd. I stand in my backyard and listen for the trees, listen for the raccoons standing in the trees waiting for me to leave.

\*

There are seven requirements for a casting core. The Capitoline Wolf is made of bronze, stands in the Palazzo dei Conservatori on the Capidoglio.

Whether you believe the story is beside the point.

\*

*The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Current English* says raccoon can be spelled racoon, but autocorrect will right it. Dexterous and intelligent, the coon never tires and will eat almost anything: garbage, leaves, insects, other vertebrates.

*Other vertebrates.*

\*

*This place is not ideal.*

\*

We fight for four days the week we move in. Until no one says anything.  
The paint stays half-finished until June.

\*

In the green condition there must be adequate strength for handling.

\*

We move in winter, move *for* winter. Two bedrooms, two bath, unfinished  
basement, a lawn. She has a job up north. Down here is where she wants to be,  
even though the drive is long.

The highway, three miles from here, takes 17 minutes to get to.

\*

The dog takes the prime real estate of our back yard. Chews grass, digs holes in  
the center of each bed, buries bones and biscuits, my watch, and one lone shoe:  
some blue Croc left by a previous tenant.

\*

Animalia, Chordata, Mammalia—  
There is evidence of scratching on the lid of every can.  
—Carnivora, Procyonidae, Procyon, Iotor.

\*

We redefine the morning. She goes into her room, I go in mine. At eight she hits the road.

Week one there are eagles here, a nest on one of the playing field lights.

\*

When she leaves I put her toothbrush in my mouth. I hold it there two hours.

\*

Native range in red, introduced colored in blue.

\*

On a good day the drive is one hour, twenty minutes door to door. On a bad day it could be three hours.

\*

It is said of conservation, these are creatures of Least Concern.

\*

We don't know what the heart is.

\*

We don't know what to save.

\*

When the ants file in, I do my best to sweep the bulk of them outside. I use one piece of paper to corral them onto another. I stand on the back porch and shake them into the grass.

After, I do better cleaning the kitchen and they never return.

\*

A black body is an idealized physical body that absorbs all radiation, regardless of frequency or incidence angle.

\*

I read quantum theory for the dirty talk.

\*

We can't know what the heart is.

\*

Or where.

\*

The car breaks down or does not break down. In any case, I'm late. I keep having dreams of being trapped in Lewis Hall. All the doors are locked and I can't find the bathroom. Warmth trickles down my leg and the hall smells like new carpet.

\*

Home range sizes vary seven acres for females in cities to 20 square miles for males in prairies.

\*

I find a closet and I squat.

\*

Our lot is .2 acres. The bully unearths the biscuit. When confronted, shows teeth below the mask.

\*

I water beds and trees to make some things grow. The neighbor builds a rocket out of her newborn's fist.

\*

All the doors are locked and the windows never budge.

\*

The neighbor doesn't like my dog. She barks, as dogs do. But I never leave her in the yard alone longer than a minute when she's like that because I fear the fight for territory.

\*

The second week some condos burn the next street over. The sky glows red and everyone stands on the sidewalk looking up.

\*

The best bonfires are built with balled up newspaper and small sticks for kindling,  
and logs built into an inverted V.

I sit alone with mine, drinking whiskey and eating marshmallows straight from  
the bag.

Ferries are strips of light that move slow on an invisible horizon and the woody  
smoke blows inland, burns my eyes.

\*

Phone calls are hard, but texts go through. Sometimes blank ones.

She says she loves me.

I send pictures of where I am, of trees in bloom, my lunch, of statues on campus.  
In one George Washington stands with his back to me watching sun set over the  
Olympic range.

\*

I wait for the green spark, but I have never seen it.

\*

It is an ideal emitter.

\*

*We take it, break it, give it back.*

\*

The baby's tiny fist.

\*

A diffuse emitter.

\*

In the hardened state it must be strong enough to handle the forces of casting.

\*

I don't know anyone who wants kids who doesn't already have them.

\*

Week three: we fight. She calls an hour after leaving. I think I can hear the ocean, and some planes. I ask her where she is.

“A payphone.”

“That's *what*.”

“What?”

“I asked *where*.”

“I forgot my cell phone,” she tells me.

I see it on the couch beside me.

Suddenly I want to be there with her, standing on the street or beach or boardwalk, watching planes. I want to hear the dial tone.

\*

The tone stops when the first numeral is dialed.

\*

It gets into everything. I say “it,” though there could be more than one. Animal control wants nothing to do with me.

“Call if you trap it,” the man says.

\*

And then what?

\*

My mother threw the phone once, but it was just the receiver. She tried to rip the whole thing off the wall. Yellow plastic hung like a jaundiced eyeball, wires of orbital sinew in upside down U.

\*

I was born exactly on my due date, at 5:23am, Central Time in Kansas. On time, a quick birth, and the only planned offspring of my mother’s four.

\*

The world’s smallest baby was born at 21 weeks and six days. Her feet are the size and color of red gummi bears.

\*

And when it swung: the bell sound.

\*

A raccoon gestates for 63 days. The average litter size is three to five young. She could have had so many by now.

\*

I associated with the story of Romulus and Remus immediately, suckled by a she-wolf, destined for history.

\*

Week four: a pickup truck hits my door as I exit my car, does not slow. I see my life this time.

When I get inside she asks if I got the plate. Confused, I think about flatware. And then think, oh. "No," I say.

"You should have."

\*

My door won't close properly now. I hear the wind in it when I drive fast. I tell myself it's cosmetic. Or that the jaws of life can reach me easier now if I ever get in a bad wreck.

\*

There has to be a minimum generation of offgassing during metal pouring.

\*

*You don't waste any time.*

\*

I was only supposed to kiss her. But, oh how the blood flows,  
nosing through the hull.

\*

Radio frequency is a rate of oscillation.  
For other uses, see oscillator (disambiguation) and oscillation (mathematics).

\*

She stands on her toes and is taller, looks down on me.

\*

The raccoon has a body built for climbing and can drop from a height of 40 feet  
and walk away unscathed.

After I learn this I stop standing under the hemlock.

\*

It does not sleep.

\*

Week five I accompany a friend to her abortion. Week five we go to the beach  
and I lose my shoes. We never go together again.

\*

The absolute refractory period is the interval during which a second action  
potential cannot be initiated, no matter how large the stimulus.

Good refractoriness is required as the core is usually surrounded by hot metal during molding.

\*

I start reading Walter Benjamin. No one told me which book to read, only that his thinking on aesthetics are vital. That he is a “good person to read.”

Going by titles, I choose *The Arcades Project*. But I can't get through a whole paragraph without forgetting what is being talked about.

This might not be his fault, but I will blame him.

\*

Once we stopped for breakfast without planning anything, which is unlike us. We were just walking and then breakfast happened.

She ordered oatmeal; I ordered pancakes. She got bacon; I got the fake kind. The blueberries were bad in that they were not ripe yet. They made the short stack bitter.

\*

I go to the beach alone again; I lose my phone. I convince a handsome stranger to call me until I find myself. When he leaves he asks for my number.

\*

Permeability must be very high. Escape velocity.

Something to leave the house.

\*

The girl has certain charms. A book collection I can stare into when I've got nothing to say.

A mouth I'd like to live in.

\*

One night the raccoon bares its teeth, chases the dog, who makes a noise I've never heard before. I bring a broom. The animal turns and faces me. I have on socks on and no shoes. I kick its hoary side and it returns to tree. The top of my foot retains a physical echo of the creature's hard round side for hours.

\*

The dentition, 40 teeth with the dental formula: 3.1.4.2 / 3.1.4.2, is adapted to an omnivorous diet. The carnassials are not as sharp and pointed as those of a full-time carnivore.

\*

The rest of the night I image search animal bites and read about rabies. Did you know it can lie dormant for up to five years?

\*

"The world's smallest baby was born without ears."

"That isn't true."

\*

I don't know anyone who wants children.

\*

*A pause, a rose, something on paper.*

\*

My mother wants to know if I can get divorced.

“I don’t mean if you want to, I mean if you are capable. Like, how that works.”

I put the I and you in there, but I am only imagining the conversation.

\*

The best blackberries I’ve ever eaten grow under the complex A-frame of an electrical tower. The span of towers cuts a narrow slit of field between two dark sets of woods. Brambles grow between and up the metal legs.

Arm hairs stand vertical when you’re there, and you can hear the power humming the whole time.

\*

Week six the neighbor lady with the baby goes crazy. It is nine p.m. when she beats on our front door, screaming.

I am alone. Or rather, it is just me and the dog. The dog is riled, but takes my cue and stays silent. We both just stare. Through the tiny windows at the top of the door I see the frizz of the neighbor’s blonde hair, usually so kempt.

I am sorry, I whisper. Sorry sorry sorry.

\*

As the casting or molding cools the core must be weak enough to break down as the material shrinks. Moreover, they must be easy to remove during shakeout.

\*

The funny thing is, I was lonely. She was outside my door, I was inside my door. Human-to-human, I thought. There is a human only a five feet away. I thought about opening the door. I thought about what I would say. Maybe, "I know you're busy with the baby and everything, but I have a selection of teas."

\*

Everything about my mother happens second-hand through my aunts, her sisters. We haven't spoken in 15 years. Nobody understands it and everybody gets tired of suggesting we make up because there isn't anything to make up except the time she tried to kill me, which my aunt says never happened.

\*

I make friends, but I find myself placing personals, filling out profiles online. Every picture obscures my face. People are interested anyway.

"You have a way with words," one girl says.

I don't write back.

\*

A smooth surface finish.

\*

Ears bordered in white fur.

\*

And also all the childhood stuff, but we were both kids then.

\*

There is a raccoon dead in the alley, blood around its mouth. Is this what I wished for. I call animal control. They say they will send someone out.

When I peek out the gate an hour later, the animal is gone.

\*

*As I stood on the bridge, the traffic ran one way.*

\*

The next day another neighbor talks about the stress of newborns. The neighborhood hosts a parade and the children sing, “Ja, vi elsker” over and over.

Yes, we love. Yes, we love.

**(3)**

## **Raised By Wolves**

One girl's finger on another girl's—  
Tap, tap.  
Didn't mean it to get so far.

*You're going too deep,  
No farther for me.*

“Let's play ‘do you trust me’ or  
what did you call it...?”

One girl's mouth on another girl's growl.

\*

They say she was raised by wolves,  
How to keep the bait away,  
But really she was born in Wichita,  
Reared in suburban towns of the northeast corridor.  
Saw her first roadkill twitching as a truck went by  
Slowly, slowly  
On the Schuylkill Expressway.  
Fur shuddered in the hot late June dirty boxcar boxcar wind.  
Compression brakes squeal or scream like a last whatever for it.  
Dead or dying, mother tapped the wheel.

“We'll never get to camp this way”  
and then she never went.  
Tap, tap, wolf den  
Mother's ring vibrated the wheel.

The car overheated and the roadkill twitched.  
“Sleeping,” the girl said.  
“Sleeping,” her mother said.

Nothing is restful at ten miles an hour.

\*

It's like this every day:  
jump at small sounds, and the big ones,

well, they can damage.

There is something to living a life full  
of buckshot, covered in hair, eyes full of wild.

The soft hair brings a growl  
when rubbed on right.

## **Standing Under the Pivot**

Wednesday, February 6, 2013

1.

Goodbye iron, hello cat. They said,  
a return to the gold standard is what we need.

A tattered game board, fraying at creases. Greece continues  
austerity measures, and Virginia worries over monetary collapse,  
hyper inflation, the complete loss in confidence of paper money.  
The what-if?

The pieces have been the same since 1935.  
The bird was banded in 1956.

My sister sits in a big brick home, built 2002.  
Her children stack army men into orgies of green.

“We must reduce the workforce in a compassionate way.”

What town did you grow up in? Guns. The boy scouts find  
that they are no longer relevant. The bank has housewives.

The postman rubs his calves with tiger balm. Does stretches Saturdays.  
The house stands in shade.

Amish on Amish violence. With clippers and mane scissors.  
To those who don't believe:

a shaved beard and knived suspenders.

There is nothing like shame. Nothing  
like bullion. Gold standard.

Iron, dog, and top hat.

2.

The Laysan albatross is thought to be 62 years old.

A house with steep stairs. A house with no handrail.  
Nanny in place who speaks no English.

She hatched a new chick, healthy.

They will be bilingual she says.  
They ironed it out.

The new feline will arrive by fall.

My sister's children attend a day care in Fairfax run by granddaughters  
of the daughters of the DAR.

The iron is out.  
My sister's floor is spotless.

It doesn't matter, he said.  
They are no longer relevant.

My sister's husband builds history  
with blacked-out windows on the ground floor.

The guy on the horse always wins; everybody knows that.  
But the horse is also retired.

The voting was heavy.

My sister says hush on the phone.

Every six months he grows a beard. So charming it can't be stopped.  
The voting heavy. Corporate America stepped in.

—fills the room with this warm bass feeling.

He's gone so long the children forget him.  
My sister says hush when I ask.

What world are we living in? I ask. I think it's this one.  
A man named Samuel Mullet. No wonder.

The voting for helicopter, guitar, robot. Where are we living?

And government workers at the state level signed contracts  
that said they would back any move to secede.

What future? And the neighbors still reference the reclamation,  
reconstruction, Federalist papers.

A man hammers a hook into a barn wall.

My sister's brick house. There were sponsors for some, but not the lesser ones.  
An alternative to any lack of control.

No heavy-hitter hopped on board for the iron.

Does anyone iron anymore? A death is much more likely  
in a house with a gun. More talk of cutting Saturday service.

The postmaster is a friend to no one. A death is much more likely.

Give me paper towels,  
or give me a restroom door I can exit without having to use my hands.

## Build Me Up

The men with the hammers are unwilding the lot across the street,  
2X4 by 2X4 replacing nettles and berry brambles,  
rush skeltonweed, bindweed and bull thistle,  
and tall stabs of lupine that pull bees from neighboring yards,  
and the mossed slabs of concrete steps,  
and that one squat bit of disintegrating wall.  
Every now and then a steady rhythm one can cling to  
ratchets out of the clapboard and pine struts,  
saying buildme-up, buildme-up.

Is it echo off the condos that surround  
or two men tuning together into the same cadence?  
Thudthud rest, thudthud, rest.

And then the staplegun comes in high and eager,  
to join what will be electrical  
to the joists that will house the walls  
that will house the wires  
that will bring the light and tv.

And one night after all the walls are up and painted  
and the roof assembled  
and the sink tiled and the tub caulked in  
and the carpet laid  
to catch hair and dust and dander.  
One night when the faucet drips  
and that is the only sound  
or the street is cleared of the No Parking signs  
so that there is the crisp settling  
noise of tires against curb  
and that is the only sound  
or the skylight is cracked open  
to the outbound end of the airport's holding pattern  
and a distant engine unspooling is the only sound  
or the squirrels have found the only tree left,  
one saggy birch, and from it the attic,  
and begun nesting in there for the long lean toward winter  
and that busy scratching is the only sound  
or the cat you somehow let into your life is backing out  
of its covered box in the basement  
and scattering clay on concrete  
and sounds like something subtly crumbling  
and that is the only sound.

And that whatever one sound ends

and it's just you, and the night  
and you check his room to see your child  
is gone or hiding and your heart hops up  
and bursts in your ears and all you can hear is the

hammering hammering hammering.  
All you can feel is the cold wet climbing into your hands.  
And you let out a yell but you can't hear it for  
the buildme-up:

let out a yell and all the nails in the house start shuddering loose.

## More of the Same

I want to talk about Spring without azaleas, incessant violets, violent pinks.  
Without forsythia's impatient stab of sulfur.  
Without hydrangea's tender green, and the rose's curled red leaves.  
Without pale hellebore, those tough rust blooms and sepals.  
Without eggs of pussy willow buds downy on naked stems, fine as fur on snowy plovers.  
Without chalked walks and shock of phlox,  
without those knives of iris.  
Without the checkered slant of empty grape vine arbors.  
Without withered wisteria dry grey, like jumbled threads on looms.  
I want to stitch the day without the nascent verdure of shrubs and trees,  
without nature's antiphon of perennial,  
the neighbor's brave tillage of primrose and pansy,  
without tomato starts colonizing warm windows.  
I can't get past the sneezes, obscene plum bloom succor, cherry blossoms' street parades.  
Full bins of yard waste, couches pulled on porches, the mountain out and blue sky,  
yards all starred with crocus.  
The new flight of young osprey and the house wrens' tinny cry.  
Dog fur lifted for new nests, cats mewling to get out.  
The bass thud, bass thud, bass thud of a car's slouch driven hard.  
Her sleeveless pale and grass-wet humming-in-fluorescence.  
The daffodils.

## Autologous and Caul

Gulls mob the pylons, drop styrofoam  
bits and fishbones. And what's left  
of the storm paws open my coat.

It's winter, but you wouldn't know it.  
Joggers jog sleeveless and boys in shorts  
hunt for I don't know what along docks,  
faces staring down at the slats.

Sunslant reds ships' sides,  
and that damp curve of sand.  
Brackish swell slaps wet trash against stone,  
and the breakwater leeches thin slips of oil into the sea.

On the pier old men on upturned buckets  
tap feet as transistor radios make a racket.  
And each fishing line meets the deep  
in a slackening C.

There were boys on the wrecked  
bridge that day. On upturned buckets,  
fishing.

Rebar curled up from cracked asphalt.  
I had nothing but worry and bad  
cafeteria food in me,  
grey potatoes and Salisbury steak.

Her room was so green,  
pulsed with pale noise,  
smelled of fake lavender and plastic wrap.

On the bridge one boy said gun in Spanish  
and pointed. But it was only my camera.

*Camera*, I said, *estoy tomando cuadros*.  
I blocked the sun with my hand.

The boy stood, palm on the knife  
hooked to his belt, hip cocked sideways.

I took a picture of him,  
made the clicking sound with my tongue,

hooked a few shots of blue through the holes  
pocking pavement, turned back.

Steam plant churned the hospital  
like it was on fire.

She died that night, mouth open,  
blood never got right.

The boy is still  
in my camera, sun bright on rubble, wind wild,  
life still a matter of odds.

## Dot Dot Dot

In the fifth grade some man tried to get Annika into his car.  
It was after school, the bus circle,  
her mother was late.

For weeks after Annika showed us the bruise.  
It went all the way around her arm.  
I wanted to put my hand there,  
poke in at the dark parts. But we didn't play that game.

She was east European, had a strange name, greasy hair,  
a birthmark on her neck that I secretly loved.  
It was the color Crayola raw umber  
and changed shape with which way her head moved.  
Antarctica, a lion,  
Abe Lincoln in profile.

She spoke English clearly,  
but her mother's thick accent counted against her.  
"Vat is your talkeeng abote, Ah-neek-ah?"

Though there was no confusion  
with the pronunciation of her name,  
she introduced herself as "Annika, rhymes with Chanukah."  
(It was a Jewish neighborhood.)

At eleven she was five-seven, the tallest in our class,  
already had her period, which she called "Dot,"  
and was asked about constantly by the rest of us  
(as later she was asked about the interior of the man's car.)

All of this is why we could cleave so neatly from her,  
view the near-abduction as mere fluke.  
Any of these differences could stand for cause,  
though no one said she was asking for it.

**White Woman Bottoms** (Southwest, Kansas)

Cows dot the plains, evenly spaced.  
Brown, white, brown, black, black, brown, black.  
The white one burns pink through, and grackles peck at nothing in the dead and yellow grass.  
Heart-shaped pond sooty with a trample.

The water reflects the bluewhite sheet of sky  
some duck is just a dirty mark in.

Its nest half-cocked, looks ready to fall from what  
was the T of the power pole  
weighted into a V. The glass knobs hold the wire, concentrate  
the sun into stars on the field.

*Blue umbrella pegged open against a bent wood fence.  
Rock in which a face looks handcarved, but is only geology.*

*The land, the rocks, the wild.  
High shelf of red, sage green tufts, the sky both red and blue.*

*In the car, her sandaled feet.  
Her feet ash white, calloused, big toe really big.*

*Hands folded underneath her chin.*

*She sleeps. The pink gets in. The blue.  
Hair pressed in, some hair wild.*

*Forehead cools against glass.  
The train car decides between howl and growl.*

*Against a backdrop of plains,  
a dozen pronged antelope navigate a shallow stream.*

*When she wakes she will ask for more paper.  
One more sheet? Godbless. I give five each time.*

*She fills them. She reads Romans. Seems stuck  
on that one page. Between pauses on the book,  
the slow page turn, she fills the notebook sheets.*

*In her lap a stack:  
three full notebooks, and a bible, and  
a tattered romance.*

## **No One Waits**

No one waits in the side yard for the light to come on.

No moths tick against cold panes.

The growl is not a snore though it rises from the bedclothes.

Though it rises from stained sheets the scent is not of blood but love.

No hat decorates the coat rack.

No pale shirt has fallen to the floor.

No dog's paw has muddied anything, and you can bet all boots were off.

No tighter tight and blue-bright through star and moon-punched skylight.

No water on the floor.

No one did the dishes.

No calico ginger-steps the egg pan, purring at the instruments.

No half-mined pomegranate pinks the countertop.

No cake crumbs below the bread knife.

There's no one on the porch.

Five cut apples there, cored and rotting in a jar.

That glass could slip or freeze.

There is no mystery here.

No charmed life, no wind or time, no backwards kiss goodbye.

## Some Terrible Thing

I lie when I say I have no plans,  
to sit at home with you  
like old marrieds.  
It was just a year ago I was sure you'd leave.  
And that it'd be the worse for you.

I have trouble making up my mind—  
capable, as I am, of seeing all paths at once illuminated.  
But when I do—

Cars strewn throughout the parking lot  
with trees on top.  
The smell of pine bough replaced  
by asphalt and traffic,  
the highway near.  
I am imagining this place from above—

artless with intermittent twin circles of light.  
And all the parallel lines half-filled with cars,  
irregular and oblong oil leaks.  
If someone looks down from that passing plane

they'll know nothing of these sorrows,  
but they'll still have their own.

So many things are predicated on  
disaster just not happening.  
Cigarette smoking, for instance.  
Getting behind the wheel.  
Pregnancy or conversation.

I watch the storage facility burn.  
And then the hill of trees goes up behind.