

**Managed.**

# Pall

*for J.A.*

I am developing a shield  
for the negative,

the minus,

the reverse,

the parenthetical  
taking away.

Claustrophobia is  
the initiative

bought and paid for,

crowded into a small room,

drinking water,  
fingering a small screen.

The calisthenics of  
so many  
bodies,

wheezing black bitters,

ruptured from the current  
plane of being

like a pill,

like shadow growing  
cubic in a corner  
with a Jack hat.

There will be no selling it  
today.

The pall is p i n c h i n g  
its ratchet  
straps.

# Attache

*for A.F.*

He hides the situation inside a pocket,  
a slight s l i t in the lining. Impeccable.

The unnatural erectness speaks accident,  
rods and pins, unholy rollover.

The blue lagoon  
look in his eyes,

hair so gray  
he almost disappears.

Fate is a blowtorch.

In the meetings, he steeples the skinraft  
but won't turn his head.

He ignores the hammerlock  
and never tells the whole truth.

# Target Practice

*for R.R.*

The conference table skips  
across the triennium  
We are scattered  
in our male, female minds  
like tiddly winks  
All the other chips are blue  
Me, red, in my houndstooth

I hear all the mouth-to-mouth  
vocalized across the table  
w i n k, w i n k

The double standard  
singes my hair  
Little brother, you are excused

As instructed  
I only speak  
when addressed

The potato chips  
are especially good;  
they corrugate my tongue

We can agree  
on that

I slide the detritus  
of a subpower lunch  
onto an empty chair;  
ah, divided plate,  
the origami mouth  
would cry foul

if I weren't  
consulting my navel

# Motherless

*for V.B.*

Every day she builds a box,

blistering blue of her eyes  
intent on enclosure:

smooth, straight, sheltering.

She crafts the boxes immaculate,  
sanding down to the loneliness,  
raw wood resin sticky on her fingers:

but still,  
she levels us

with her planing.

The boxes mean well.  
She wants to add a door.

Instead she is too generous:

giving away her hinges, hammers,  
horsepower.

She micro-moves in mitered  
factions, unloading hanks  
of honeyed hickory, striations of pulp

proof of the pain  
ingrained.

Every morning she builds one,  
only to be demolished  
by the sneering superior,

despite her straining hard  
to hold the small room together

with the four corners  
of her wrists and elbows.

But she is indomitable  
with a nail-gun,  
sleek like her mother,

the s l i v e r in the eye of a great man.

# The Female Middle

after "The Applicant" by Sylvia Plath

First, do you have the right background?  
The right experience? The right  
track record? Can you fill in  
the blanks between male and  
male and male? Can you navigate

the high-walled maze of having  
an opinion and not? Can you say: "You're  
wonderful. You're a genius. I've never  
had a boss like you"? Your face  
the unrippled cement of disingenuous?

No? No? Then how can *he* teach you  
a thing? How can he guide you  
by the elbow? See, here's the table.  
Don't you come to it empty?  
Can't you toady it?

What? You're the same age?  
With experience remarkable?  
Award-winning? You want  
to be taken seriously? A peer  
collaborator? You know if

the door is open, ideas will visit,  
shuffling in in their overlarge  
shoes or chiseled stilettos.  
Brainchildren! Two heads  
are always better than one

swollen one. Here, take the  
hierarchy and smash it  
like hard crack candy into  
shimmering shards, the ruby  
of anise, the golden glow of a new

day butterscotch. Suck it!  
Ruminate on the sweet taste.  
How it creates saliva, sliding  
down the elevator of a throat  
to a level without ceiling.

Balk, balk, balk. Can't we cease  
the puffed up pontificating, the  
thumping of the table, teetering on  
unsteady legs, eradicating the need  
to toady it, toady it, toady it.