

There is No Fire Here

Poetry

## STROKE

the ants in the carpet have climbed onto her head and  
the jars of strawberry preserves.

green beans she'd snapped on the back porch have spilt into the sink from water  
still filling the bowl.

the oven burns doughnuts she was making from buttermilk biscuits  
down to six rings of charred bread.

the smoke needs more time to fill the home

the boys are with their granddad at Bull Lake taking  
turns holding the golf ball he cut out from a snake's belly.

the snake must have thought it had swallowed an egg.

## STRAY

I wrap  
live caterpillars  
in corn husks  
to feed them to the cows  
and follow Pa  
to the chicken coup  
to watch his hands get pecked  
while retrieving eggs

but

hide  
in the truck  
when he's  
outside  
combing under the house  
with a rake and towel  
for a litter of  
strays  
to drown  
in the tub  
in the pasture

where I was baptized

## BELOW

Underneath each of the hyacinths is one of her cats  
They mark the graves that she dug on her own  
She bought a bulb on the same day they passed away  
A fifth plant will show this spring  
Two were pronounced dead on the same day, plant three and plant four, she says,  
staring into the garden  
eating a can of pork and beans from a crystal flue

She doesn't like children or her eldest sister very much  
But she does remember helping Leanne and her niece bury a squirrel when Tara was  
seven  
It was sick and not safe to pet  
They all agreed to forgive the rodent for biting Tara after returning from the emergency  
room  
Together, they sprinkled it with rosemary, thyme, and lavender from Leanne's herb  
garden then returned it to the earth

"That wasn't so bad," she says, her mouth full

The rent check, I tell her, is next to the lamp in the hallway  
She says that the lamp has always been hers  
It was a gift from her mother  
And that she's never stolen a thing in her entire life

## PARABLE

hear.

those feet hew over the road  
arched and bent the snap of thimble muscle  
lifts you like a plume of ink  
that  
great old mouth clicks  
wet with ancient hunger and parable  
charged with rain and famines  
don't kkaw at my share, brother  
you were the last silhouette off the bough  
for this downed meal  
a pale creature whose fur gets in the way  
of every bite we  
shake with red tinsel between our beaks you  
still keep one eye on me  
dark, mannequin, inlaid like bad prayer  
it doesn't mean a thing

eat.

your ideas are big  
your appetite is bigger

## THE TOMATOES ARE GOOD THIS YEAR

We sit like other people sit at  
the table pray like people in  
prayer we even talk like people  
talk there is a new death here  
at the head of the table we  
pass the turkey the dressing the  
pie in the second week of October  
we tell stories trade memories  
like factory canners when it's not  
our turn we sharpen new exits  
in the backs of our throats and  
notice the carpet is still green -  
after all these years wonder if  
that mirror was always at the end  
of the hallway the plate of  
tomatoes reach him the him that  
will be dead by the real Thanksgiving  
the tomatoes that he grew himself  
he removes a slice from the plate  
the first slice removed from  
the plate he takes a bite and  
a giant little outburst slips right  
out he doesn't cry long or share  
the future he catches it quick  
says, "Sorry, folks. The tomatoes  
are just that good."  
He passes them to his left this  
time around we all take one  
we agree the tomatoes are good.