

## IT MUST BE

### I

It must be summer

Ouija board reception buffeted by  
wind blowing through 18<sup>th</sup> century  
cottonwoods big enough to shelter every

lost soul in the neighborhood  
sitting in front of table  
fans forgetting to take their meds  
wanting to feel human again

It must be summer

dog barks subdued by  
heat hatched chickadee  
shells on the ground  
baby rabbits wailing for their  
mothers in moonlight

plastic sharks hunt

frogs leaping into  
back yard wading pools  
for a few laps and a drink

It must be summer

empty school parking lots  
take attendance  
send deer bears  
cougars campers to detention  
as smoke chases them down the mountain

bare legged back packers  
fill European train stations  
fretful parents leave  
bread crumb trails to  
front porches

It must be summer  
car radiators boil  
over batteries fry in the sun  
closets morph into spillways  
for coats sweaters boots

Senators vacate D.C.  
life jackets in tow  
cherry blossoms long gone  
bone white  
monuments shimmer in their  
wake

It must be summer  
beach balls sell out  
umbrellas mushroom above  
baked surfers medium rare  
swimmers well-done kids with pails and  
shovels battle incoming  
waves of invaders

Canada geese Mallard  
ducks blue herons adorn  
sand bars in evaporating

rivers Russian olive roots  
snake into banks for moisture

It must be summer  
cows forage in the  
shade bat insects with tails  
hit homeruns into lenses of bird watchers

## II

It's on TV my mother said  
so it must be true

You're kidding  
I said getting up for a snack but  
then she cried as though  
my father had slapped her face  
made fun of her polyester  
pantsuit of many colors

shot the dog  
we were watching a jello ad cut  
from the same mold as the family that  
prays together stays together

why are you laughing  
my mother said  
lips pursed  
vertical forehead vein bulging

I sat down  
examined my hands for  
answers it was 1967  
placid episodes of *Andy Griffith*  
played out across the country

viewers smiling  
as though their lives  
depended on it while

troops not lucky enough to  
live in Mayberry arrived at airports in body  
bags from Southeast Asia

You're right I said  
my mother's jaw  
failing to relax

it's on TV so  
it must be true

### III

“It must be Kirk,” Sean said. The sound at the back door was distinctive. Two quick knocks then three quicker ones. He learned it from private eye Paul Drake on re-runs of *Perry Mason*. “He’ll let himself in.”

“What if it’s somebody imitating Kirk,” I said. “A total stranger could be walking through the house right now – an axe murderer for all we know.”

Playing along, Sean raised his index finger to his lips to signal silence. We heard no footsteps on the wood floors, no sniffing or sneezing or deep breathing even though Kirk’s allergies were out of control this time of year. No rustling of arms in windbreaker sleeves swinging in tempo with legs scissoring forward.

“On the other hand,” I said, “who else navigates as soundlessly as moccasins on soft earth, stealth bombers in night skies.”

“It must be him,” said Sean, beginning to doubt his senses.

#### IV

Two A.M. The old land line phone Dana keeps by the bed rings a few times before she answers it. She hears a dial tone. It must be a wrong number, she tells herself, getting up for a glass of water. Rosie the cat comes out from under the covers to monitor Dana's trek to the kitchen and back. Black Bean, Rosie's feline nemesis, stays asleep on the padded dresser.

The phone rings again. Dana runs in just in time for another dial tone. Must be kids with nothing better to do than call random numbers in the middle of the night and scare people to death. Bad news is what a body expects at this hour, she says under her breath.

The third time she lets it ring and ring and ring until she pulls it out of the wall and buries it in the sock drawer. The cats are taken aback by Dana's quick and definitive action. They approach the space that used to be occupied by the phone the way they would stalk prey. It's OK, she says, climbing back into bed. It can't hurt us now.

V.

Could it be, skeptical woman asks

It must be, confident man says

Blocked phone numbers

encrypted emails

visits after dark blinds

drawn loud music

escape up the coast behind

tinted VW van windows

Big Sur closed

Oregon rock arches rising from surf

Olympic Peninsula Redwoods

China Beach mussels

sautéed over Vancouver Island campfires

smoking embers at

dawn hot enough to warm

hands make English breakfast

tea toast the creator of sleeping

bags that zip together

How can you know all that, the woman asks

I followed them in a dream, the man says

it happens all the time

truth is a burden best discovered on the sly

It must be, she says, taking delivery