

## Ceremony

Every night I watch my wife draw progesterone  
into a needle. With a snap of cap and quick twist  
she replaces the sharp, pushes out air bubbles  
then flicks away the oil and hands me the syringe.  
Left cheek one night, right cheek the next.  
Some nights blood trickles down her thigh, others,  
oil beads at the puncture. When I pull the plunger  
back after sliding the needle in, a thousand bubbles  
appear. I look for blood from a vein and seeing none  
reverse pressure. The bubbles disappear as quickly.  
I slowly press what is in the barrel into my wife.  
Hub against skin, you would never know  
the long stainless needle until I withdraw it.  
Doubling every week, she says you are now the size  
of a kidney bean. Here and not here, I am as close  
to the stars as fire, to flying away as unfolding.

## Sunday Self-Portrait as Rural Teacher

Sunday night and once again  
I have forgotten to take the can  
from the back of the house through  
the wooden gate to the end  
of the gravel driveway. A pilgrimage  
to stand upon the edge  
of this quiet street, in this quiet town.

To my right, a tree limb fell  
on the widow's house in last night's  
windstorm. And left, a husband  
with early onset dementia  
whose daughter has moved back in.  
Half a block away, the back lights  
of the whiskey distillery  
glow warmly upon the alley  
as two deer feed on a trailer full of mash.

## Impulse

I found myself on the river again.  
The dog kept eating salted roe  
left smeared on the rocks  
like Michelin one star caviar.  
And the rain kept on, heavy  
fog drifting between canyon walls.  
All day the thick slurry of mud  
requiring all-wheel drive, deepened.  
And by evening, driving home  
involved staying between ruts  
of heavy slush and ice. It almost  
isn't worth mentioning a day  
of fishing like this. Except the two  
silver fish that filleted out buttery  
orange on my cutting board.  
And the heron that landed so close  
I could have stolen a feather.

## Treachery

Through the inch and a half dust  
and broken soil of worn down river bench,  
a rattlesnake moves by a tent near bare feet.  
Three straight days of hundred-ten degree weather,  
red cheeks, short tempers, shortened fishing  
and now a storm breaks the air with humidity.  
Draws this richly-patterned serpent out from  
the brush. How can it know, as it makes its way  
toward the hidden rodent hole, a stick  
will pin it to the ground, a rock to end its life.

## Portrait of a Rural Teacher Driving Home After Dark

The sky a smudge of axle grease  
over darker stains as dusk  
draws close with windy breath  
and enough light to see deer, sodden  
in the muddy fields, to brake;  
to be taillights and stalled oncoming  
headlights and the emptiness  
of what-ifs and the emptiness  
after another small town, of great gaps  
of road without passing another vehicle.

If wipers are what lies in front,  
time is what lies behind, oncoming  
rain, spatters and thuds; as the river  
climbs, so too, the road. As rain turns  
sleet turns snow, and heavy light  
becomes a tunnel leading anywhere.  
But if there never was anywhere  
to arrive, to turn key from ignition  
and light having left, in darkness  
the sound of wings accumulating on roof  
as it must feel to be buried in dirt  
as it must feel in darkness to fly away.