

Tuckpointing

The Virgin Mary up at St. Mary's is wrapped in a drop cloth
the color of stone. It is pulled over her face,
drawn down around shoulders to her feet, the corners seized
and tied in a bunched knot across her waist.
She is mute, visionless in the blankness of sacking, muffled
from sparrow calls in the cedars.
No eye may look upon her.
In a week her son sets his sights
on the city, dashes in with the crowd
and no caution. In two he is
besieged and bared.

March snow weighs Mary's wrappings down
upon her. The shroud sags—
her right hand, pale stone appears,
three fingers raised against shadows that suffocate.
Her staying power pierces like a sword, the fibers darken
over her breast. Snow splays
across her naked toes—
a white dove
shelters there.

Cellar Talk

A dark spot appears on the cellar floor alongside bits of coal that fall yet from cracks hidden along steel beams and ceiling. Nearby wait two maple cribs with wide spacing between slats on sides that drop, a failing cardboard box that offers a physics text depicting the electron as the smallest part of an atom and three oak chairs with broken legs and caneless seats. When the children are at war and yelling, *no, I won't*, you banish them from play and descend to the damp of the limestone foundation. The afternoon you stop to chat with your parents but not with your friend in the nursing home, and learn that she has slumped, finally, you carry the laundry basket to the basement and ball your hands up in your eyes. One son leaps for a research job that is wrenched from his fingertips and your cheering for Cambridge is sacked, the other rolls his father's dreams into a roach and your husband sprawls over the dining table surface, his shudders shake the cherry boards. You descend the steep steps, open the slatted door held shut with a wooden-handled screwdriver stuck through the latch and go to the uttermost back of the coal bin, sit in a plastic lawn chair and burrow your face into your thighs. Now your grandson's twenty-six-year old uncle lies still and supine, with the little boy's pirate drawing propped against his uncle's arm. Beside the drawing rise three pastel roses from the little boy's sister, the girl just old enough to recognize the flower that bears her name. The man's only sibling, the children's mother, floats on a salty sea, their father holds her head above the surge. The spot on the cellar floor is roiling with swimmers. You are swept away.

Home Game

A winter rain pounds the roof
like the clamor at a home game
when the basketball is stolen,
dribbled downcourt and launched
on a long smooth arc.
As night gives in and ice lies down
the crowd hushes and awaits the ball's descent—

by midday the siren at the volunteer fire station wails.
The township maintenance guy slides the alley,
mechanics from the garage sprint the highway,
boys we shouted for in the old gym as they set up the play,
lofted the risky three-pointer.

They rev fire trucks to the curve beyond the ridge
while they gear up, readying to ply deliverance.
The memory of feet stomping wooden bleachers
in the stifling gymnasium embraces those shivering
on the shoulder.

—it rushes the hoop
and swishes,
the crowd rises,
their voices hoarse
with praise.

Outpatient

My friend lies on the table.
They slather her with gel,
slide the ultrasound wand
over every contour line of her breast,
then prod.

She remembers her morning walk,
the dark calves being driven off,
the hot scent of hair and hide
rising off the confined cattle.
It rises from her memory now and permeates
the room.

A needle pierces her breast,
her gown slips off,
the calves bawl and her sweaty fingers
grip the table.

On the drive home,
the hills are embroidered gold
with mown and baled hay—they
prick her eyes,
her nostrils,
her waters flow.

You Call Me to Jump

You call me to jump into a pool.
The water is dark. It looks deep.
I do not recognize the place.
Kids swim and flail,
ducklings without instinct,
some drop below the surface.
My day grows short. I hear your voice

and I hear a six-year-old yelling at me—
Auntie, help, I need help.
I push the kindergartener
up the hill on his bike
and listen to his non-stop shouts—
Look, I can ride a bike.
Can I push up my sleeves,
lift my skirt
and jump in?

Here I am,
hitting the cold surface.
Keep calling.
I need to hear your voice.