

## 122 Oakhurst Circle

All I have left of that place is the ragged pang of ghosts    stammered into gutted walls  
worth less now than before    for then it was worth something    or something more than  
the dust a shadow sleeps in

The rope hammock lay cut in the park across the street    the pine tree's needles  
rusted above it    and the Inn that had procured the plot stopped construction for the day

In the breached quiet

it seemed the shadow was the only thing    still breathing as it spoke out  
through the two-by-fours    to rid itself of hiccups as the dust sifted around it

I remember the sound of its voice was like the sound of the mourning dove at nightbreak  
just as repetitive and forsaken

The paper we had to sign was pale blue    The pen didn't write well  
the signature very thin    It must be starving by now

## **Asthma**

At King St. Station  
in Old Town  
it is our income  
My mother  
asks strangers  
for money  
as I hold her hand  
and my chest rattles  
behind the cardboard sign

When there is nothing  
for us  
to count  
in our box  
I look instead  
to the dogwoods  
that guard  
the gate and  
the daffodils  
that grin  
around the base  
of each trunk  
4 there  
6 there  
and there

\* \* \* \*

At Fairfax Hospital  
it brings Sarah to me  
walking in with  
a cookie & a wink  
every night for 2 weeks  
Her scrubs are blue  
like Dory on the walls  
and my mother's  
box of cigarettes  
and the stickers  
on my chest

When I leave  
Sarah says  
she never wants  
to see me again  
and I do not  
understand

\* \* \* \*

At the apartment  
in the girl's bedroom  
where he rapes her  
it is the reason he pauses –  
to glance down  
at the wheezing  
unabridged  
churning  
in her frame  
brittle as  
the twin bed  
on which  
they lie

She can see shapes  
in the stipple ceiling:  
a dog  
flower  
crescent moon  
beach umbrella  
what else  
    what else

\* \* \* \*

At night  
it is hard to breathe  
because I cannot  
remember  
anymore  
how her voice  
sounded  
in my lungs  
as she read to me  
a story

I think  
it was about  
a sun bear  
no  
a red panda  
    no

## **Improvisation on Djembe**

*Yours are not the hollow pounds of fists against a homeless door,  
says the drum, nor the bright clamor of eager men  
hurried to morning's promise. When you came to me  
your restless palms were still swallowed in sleep,  
all sprawled in the beatings of work and worry.  
In your dream you ask me to dance with you. I am dancing with you.  
In my dream there is a flood. It is the same as your dream,  
with the bembe pulsing its quake into our chests.  
We do not resurface, hungry for this – a neat place to drown.*

## On AirPods and Girl Scouts

If I were a Martian  
and happened upon  
the morning commute  
in Our Nation's Capital  
I might suppose  
I had stumbled  
into a funeral procession  
where the death  
of the beloved  
proved so tragic  
that each mourner  
so dressed  
and decorated  
in dark suits  
and threads  
had been struck  
white in the face  
and the hands  
and any skin that showed  
as they slouched  
with vacant eyes  
trained on their phones  
these rectangles  
of personal light  
not daring to breach  
the deep silence  
that moaned  
through the train

Yes if I  
were a Martian  
I think I might  
say to myself  
*what good and gentle beings*  
that it's their nature  
to be so tethered  
to ritual healing  
in the company  
of loss

Well reader  
I am no Martian  
but I can tell you  
that I don't belong  
here  
or anywhere

that I come from  
nothing  
and nowhere  
the kind of nowhere  
with a blank  
and rotting smell  
that would ooze  
from behind  
the eviction notice  
on our door  
and the kind of nothing  
that was made  
from the holes  
in my sneakers  
all those years ago  
and my little toes  
that would stick out  
as I walked  
down the block  
with its potholes  
and cigarette butts  
and my backpack  
so heavy  
with Pooh Bear's  
face on it  
hiding the truth  
of my crayons  
that lay broken  
and trampled  
beneath  
the large parcel  
of crack cocaine  
meant for anyone but me

I was the neighborhood's  
favorite Girl Scout

and there is nothing  
that reminds me  
of this more  
than riding the metro  
on any weekday  
in the morning  
and fumbling  
with my earbuds  
this wiry mess  
of knots  
not unlike

the tangled mass  
in my chest and  
all the while  
surrounded by  
finely creased suits  
and the white tipped ears  
of Apple AirPods  
the uniform  
of good  
and gentle beings

## Elegy With a Lump In Its Throat

Once the moon was alone      Once the moon was nowhere and cold  
Only an echo in the bleak      midwinter      swimming in windows      above  
Boston's frostbitten glow      cackling and grey      through the cobblestone  
The windows all longed to be a cirrus sky      to harbor the chirrs of snug tufted birds  
through flooded night      And the frost laid low on the loam      the fields all begged  
to be barren      And the moon to be anything but the moon      And the cold longed to claim  
his carcass      to fertilize the fields      with the knell of lunar prayer  
to plant a strange and thrashing crop      in hopes it would bloom there