

## **Guidelines**

*for getting lost at sea*

Distracted, as we are, by the holes in the ghost ship,  
we notice still the tattered sails wilting over water.

We notice also what we'd sometimes rather miss:  
the will-o'-the wisps we'd rather call marshlights  
like both a symptom and a cause; the fading ghost  
of a Roman solider and her phantom fleet.

But I'm most intrigued by what we don't notice  
right away: like the increasing size of the space  
between spectres, the lines around sightings.

Nothing glows how it ought, according to story.

Nothing more than sea shows when we need it.

## **Guidelines**

*for getting away with it*

We sift through the guidelines governing trust,  
our bones full of fire. It would seem almost  
disrespectful to *not* pilfer the shipwreck,  
so we tiptoe to the bow of the ship and  
empty its pockets. We find nothing of note,  
so we scurry to the stern of the ship and  
empty its pockets. Once more, we find nothing of note,  
so we hurry back to the beach and inspect the scraps.  
We pay special attention to the most pitiable  
driftwood the shipwreck's given us. We wish  
to fill its brittle holes, inhabit its whittled brilliance,  
and live alongside the shipworms and gribbles.  
But we can't waste time trying to decipher ash or elm,  
so we take what we can when no one's looking and scam.

## **Guidelines**

*for getting a new home*

We travel along half-paved roads in search of the cliff,  
our quest half-lit by the break of day. We arrive later  
than our maps predicted but with time enough to find  
new ways to lose focus in the dizzying patterns,  
impossible, as it is, to trace the vein slithering through  
rock to the base of the cliff. There's little to do but daydream  
about the cliff's fertile rock, how we could build into  
this cliff with our bare hands a house or home  
worth living in. We'd watch the snow fall but never settle on  
the front porch as the core of an apple left there the day before,  
not yet covered in flies, rots in slow motion. We'd be forced  
to recall the home that existed before this one, as we tip-toe  
like cartoon bandits across the clothesline from midnight  
to morning, the forests of my hometown stuck in my mouth  
like an old joke. We make the long drive home in relative  
silence, the radio only capable of dispassionate static.  
But, occasionally, we hear the faint rhythms of a song  
that hasn't yet been written but longs to exist.  
And it sounds like the prettiest thing.

## **Guidelines**

*for getting to the lighthouse*

Time passes through the lighthouse  
like a shiver, and you whisper, in triple-time,  
the vivid future of our passing, the fickle truths  
of our poetry: Death's heavy head  
comes apart at the seams at the very  
thought of it. Far away, a car stalls  
happily on the side of a highway.  
Even farther away, a body longs  
for arbitration.

And here you are, as always, surprised by what you might  
recall in an artless port: a thoughtful blend of blemishes  
bending at the hip, the menacing clouds like drones over Brooklyn.  
I won't mention the many ways in which these metonymic  
sins fail to fully represent our implicit need to disbelieve  
and doubt that which breeds in droves disbelief and doubt, though  
I could. In the past, I've measured both with a broken scale,  
and look where that got us. So now, we dock those failures  
at the screen door where we try to trace the laces of the sky  
from place of birth to place of death. The horizon never figures;  
stars escape unscathed. Below, traffic lights swing like angry  
dancers, unlit by the storm. Below that, the storm unfurls  
like a light.

## **Guidelines**

*for getting older*

The embers of this past year settle  
overhead like a storm cloud. Inescapably,  
silence remains as we tag the sun's petaled  
light with the tips of our tongues, attempting,  
fruitlessly, to taste the rain as it falls invisibly  
past us. We sit in the treacherous silence as if  
cursed, perched on a back porch from which  
we can at least finally hear the rain the way  
it's supposed to be heard: like lines of old poetry  
and long words, like a lonely night at home,  
like a small fire in a plastic bucket you never meant to set.  
We shuffle our bare feet in the overdrawn bath of night  
cooling our toes, lost in the feeling of being done  
with something you never thought you could finish.  
If we were anywhere else, would this be any different?  
We mimic the sound and shape of fear as we picture  
ourselves lost in a worse night, in a raft on rough waters,  
adrift on a sinking ship in an extradimensional hailstorm.  
In doing so, we suffer nothing of note, but the unsolicited  
twinge of regret enters like a knife.