

## Last Day

To your eyes the glare of morning  
cascades on Madison Junior High School  
like the shattered glass case  
of all the gold trophies ever won  
in the Worldwide Tournament of Hurt.  
You drop off your daughter  
and she gambols among eighth graders  
across glossy grass, a fluid feat  
of decadence in a masque  
of merry motion. The boys and girls  
gleefully swing red yearbooks  
in vinyl slipcovers like minor deities  
wielding glittering bucklers  
against the bright stains of age.  
Too swift to counter or clock, today  
becomes the day you wonder how the girls  
who were as old as she is now  
looked like sumptuous Amazons,  
always blowing up your body like a gland  
when they brushed against you  
to clank a quarter in Phil Collins,  
always kickstarting the blue ceremony  
of your breath into a calamity  
of car chases. Then you stood  
in the uncertain architecture of your blood,  
already amazed at the dances of desire,  
believing the rumors could be true  
about skin and spirit, the two  
who everyone said would always be a couple  
but who suddenly split up  
on the last day before summer break  
and move away to distant towns,  
no more substantial than the changes  
in phases of daylight, no more sure  
than the signatures of hundreds of friends.

## On All the Park Benches

where I sit some deceased nobody  
makes resting a forced memorial.  
You should be able to relax  
without mounted plaques  
making you feel you are donning  
a stranger's ghost like a vagrant  
slipping on a used blue bathrobe.  
Who cares about the Beth Williamsses  
and green gazebos in Everett,  
Washington, "Because She Loved This Place";  
The Shane and Sharon Vandygriffs  
on concrete contours at a South Dakota  
rest stop, "Remembered Fondly";  
the Jeremiah Eskew-Shakars  
bolted to polished salmon sandstone  
in a Henderson suburb, "Never Gone,  
Never Forgotten"? Who can savor  
reverie with the dead crowding  
our down time, waving scanty résumés  
like grade-schoolers believing  
the store-bought valentines  
in their hands, always hijacking  
the social elevator to the penthouse  
with the glass rotunda? This is my memo  
to the parks office: I shall not  
reincarnate as a picnic shelter  
where stepmothers in orange sweat pants  
can chow cheeseburgers and chase  
pedophiles with reptile eyes  
from their little second chances.  
No matter who comes to you  
with fat donation envelopes, no matter  
the sentimental slogans or hand-made  
brass designs, strew my ashes  
in the water supply so when people  
spread gaudy patchwork quilts  
and unpack ham sandwiches in the sun  
like penitents sacrificing to the gods  
of leisure, I'll send them screaming  
from the sudden shower of the sprinklers  
on the one memorable day  
I gave them comfort in my nameless rain.

## Shame and Guilt

You rise before dawn. As you jog the dark parking lot around the Sleep Inn in Liberty, traffic rushes down the wet highway, making the sound of a slow rip in the curtain of the universe. The air is a soupy gray haze. All the colored lights bleed so you see the bleary world through the one good eye of an old man who has abandoned memory. Twenty chain smokers cluster around the exits like shoddy supplicants at The Neon Temple of the Butane Flame. Their translucent flesh glows like onionskin. The rumpled surfing T-shirts and khaki shorts they have slept in for a week match the humble robes of pilgrims. They glance up then cast down their eyes, arms cradling cursed wombs. And you wonder if you are the founder of a new American religion. The one that fuses all doctrines and summons the final awakening. No commandments, no bibles, no sadness. Only the wise red sun smiling in the eyes of those who embrace The Three Affirmations:

*In you beats the Blood of Revolution!*

*In you blows the Breath of Reformation!*

*In you blazes the Golden Sunrise of Eternal Rebirth!*

Your first follower is a truck driver. Beer belly, green golf shirt, pure white sneakers. As he limps across yonder strip mall, he witnesses your ascension from the smoldering cigarette butt tossed under your shoe and becomes a wandering sage. His good will caravan rambles to remote hamlets and hideaways so every outcast who sees the grinning black woman, redhead, Hispanic man, bald spectacled man with a gray mustache, and blond mother on the side of his HyVee Foods truck will know the ancient tribes cleansed the movement of racism, sexism, ageism, height-ism, hair-ism, and ism-ism. No remorse, only the holy throne of the heart, the sacred blossom of the open throat. No blame, only cicadas in the horsetail grass, drumming the burden of a Missouri summer from their backs, sawing brittle tunes on trusty camp fiddles. For a totem, the jackrabbit darting from landscaped shrubs, the frightened heart seeking sanctuary. For a marvel, a miraculous vision, the mystical figure who materializes in the shape of a disgruntled city worker on the overpass at the height of the commute. With a voice of warning he announces that he descends from an alien race that watched earth for eons but for generations has lived among the blind and proud. With emotion he pleads for the chosen ones to stop resisting and welcome the bullet of belief that enters and stills the heart. The cause joins you, he calls, in the vast shooting gallery of martyrs, the cars and trucks roaring all day and night like a relentless urge into the amplified soul of Kansas City. If you believe, he whispers over the guardrail, taking aim. If you keep moving and don't stop to think you may never have to feel again.