Sentries

Startled, I brake. Above barbed wire, black eyes atop impossibly balletic necks

gaze through my windshield. I stare back. Of course I've seen them before, inside the zoo,

extended branches to blueblack tongues at feeding time. Yet here, crossroads, they guard

what? Enchanted realms where burning tigers roam licking cream from meaty cones? Do elephants

ooh and aah at dolphins' liquid grace? Might giraffes peruse perimeters of paradise, bemused by human cages

that lock from within?

Lego Day at the Children's Museum

One green, one orange, twin towers lean precariously. Twin girls, brows blanched,

stack Legos above their heads. Watching, I wonder, do they know?

Eleven years ago today,

before you kids were born, airplanes tore a blue September morning: the crash

and after. Flames bloomed from windows, useless alarms cried on and on, and people

tumbled to the ground.

To brace collapsing towers, intrepid kids gather blocks, babbling

about joining forces. No, children, go home. Chicken Little was right: the sky has fallen.

Project complete, the girls pose. Flash—they're gone. The towers remain intact

until *crash* children shatter plastic stacks, collect the pieces, begin to build.

Man Still Missing

For my grandmother

Late Tuesday evening, long day nearly gone, she burns their dinner, waiting for her man. No word. Unlike him. She falls in bed alone and listens for burglars, thinks of his gun. Restless, she moans in sleep, dreaming of fields awash in blood. Her eyes open to cold

morning light. Still no word. The cold envelops her. Where has he gone? At work, his secretary fields her call: says yesterday her man left work early, retrieved his gun, drove north to hunt, he said, alone.

The phone dies; left alone, her skin burns hot, then cold. She searches for his gun under the bed. It's gone. She panics. Is her man lost, wandering the fields?

Police search fields, paired and alone. For days, hired men traipse the hard cold. Where has he gone? Why take his gun?

Through gunless fields she's gone, heart lonely, cold.

(stanza break)

Man, gun. Cold fields alone.

Gone.

Isle of Denial

for Louisiana flood survivors

I never scrambled up attic stairs, brackish water lapping my heels clutching cookbooks, wedding photos, my baby's slippery hand, an axe.

I never shuddered, sweating, among empty suitcases, outseason clothes, Christmas ornaments, wind picking off shingles like scabs while I strained to hear the lap, lap of oars in the streets

or counted out loud one, two, three, *help* lips weak, voices cracked hours ticking by my baby's hand sliding from mine into the swirling green below

I never feared the rain
before
or reached to pull you in
never felt lucky or blessed
only certain

next time it comes for me