

Cricket Air

The cellar hatch is covered with crickets,
in lustful little packs. Pale mutations -- bloodless,
sunless, and thicker and larger --

killer crickets, who wait patiently in the cool,
in the dripless, succorless cement, in brick,
among dead roots, on wood. A few fall

each time the door is lifted, but they do not jump --
posturing as if dead until the all clear.
You go down and realize that all is cricket,

cricket is everywhere -- the heads, the bodies
disguised as stair, as wall, as root. And even
as you plot your next step -- twisting shoulder

from wall, ducking head beneath cricket roof,
holding your breath from cricket air --
they do not move. As you pass through the stairwell,

they are a silent receiving line. Hello, death-squad --
farewell afternoon's light.

Superstore

Six of this
and ten of that.

Behind every
there is another.

Deodorants
in firing squad.

Strict formation
a formulation.

Recipes
pass as product.

Oils
are indivisible.

In another aisle
bowls hold.

Cardboard cradles
glass containers.

Purchase space
purchase filler.

If everyone bought one
there'd be none.

But for every one
there is ten.

And four of brand
and more of kind.

Leftovers
are relocated.

Another bin,
another time.

(Superstore p2, new stanza)

Out the back,
down the street.

Sold together,
sold as lot.

Past date,
near cost.

For every sold,
another.

Sculptor

After the car wreck, splintering
her parents' Oldsmobile down the middle,
avoiding certain death,

she was unable
to recall or imagine beauty.
I read about her in a magazine.

The article said she had "evidently slipped
out of her seat belt." That there was a small
laceration on her forehead.

Her doctor mentioned that it was on account
of her high I.Q. that she made any progress at all.
That and being left-handed.

Imagine, as she could not,
being a prominent artist
and not remembering beauty.

Not even the ribbed frame, a dressmaker's
dummy, all blackened wires indicating
some sort of form, some curve, a neck.

She was polite to her old self,
herself before the accident.
She would stare at her own work

for hours, trying to make a connection
between those luminous glass shapes
and her current infant aesthetic.

Stripped of everything but
her doubting self, she still believed
in the innate.

She was an artist she reminded herself:
first in the hospital room,
empty as her head, where she could make nothing

(Sculptor p2, same stanza)

of the flowers at her bedside, other than soft
colored things, and again at the Museum of Fine Art
where the Van Goghs lay flat against the wall.

For most the getting by would be enough, the putting
food on spoon, the saying "Good-night"
when it was night.

But, if the article has it right,
she began almost immediately with beauty.
She retraced her own sketches,

spoke her own words aloud,
suturing lost thoughts back into place,
never quite remembering

the slipping out,
the sudden movement
what she could not change.

Bird's Blood

Fall's cafeteria of birds
settle on dead and live branches.
They are separated from this world
by their indirect looks,
their own private squawking.
They'll hardly listen
to that husky corn below
rustling its news: west wind,
west wind, north.

I once heard that a bird's blood
ran as dry as sand.
That if a bird's body, its packet,
were sliced open
blood would spill out in fine
shifting particles.
I hated birds since then,
looked forward to fall
when they pointed south
in their precise V-formations.

Now they sound about me,
senseless as wet skin against porcelain.
But come a colder wind,
my small, reliable nightmares will need to be replaced.

I Always Write While Waiting for Men

stutter over words until they click and lock.
Until the bedroom door not opening is not a presence.
The quiet phone should cease ever ringing.
All I want is endless stuttering, those clicks
and locks, and unlocks and unravels
the verbs loosed into future tense, they will occur
somewhere later on the page.

When I lie in bed,
hold my body more still than sleep,
words insist, but they promise nothing.
They refuse to wake a man.