

### *The Carousel*

The food court at the mall on a Saturday afternoon  
The carousel plays the tune to "ring around the rosy pocket full of posy ashes ashes we  
all fall down"  
Like a windup box that's been permanently wound  
playing without the words and its dreary reminders of plague and stink and  
death

He is young and wearing cut off sleeves  
with a gold chain around his neck and rings in his ears  
and a big Fighting Irish tattoo

And my ceaselessly judgemental mind does a once over and dismisses in the blink of  
an eye

He sits alone next to his daughter in a wheelchair  
and suddenly scoops her up and holds her for just a moment while she plays  
with a rattle  
(though she must be seven or eight)  
and is oblivious to his spontaneous affection

He puts her back when the girls mother returns with his food  
and proceeds to be occupied with phone and fries  
They eat in silence, but every once in awhile he gives her that side look and I  
can tell

He just wants to hold her again

### *Funnel Clouds*

Driving home  
radio on.  
Listening to reports of tornadoes pummeling houses, cars  
and people.  
Including a mother and her infant daughter who were sucked out of the car window  
while stuck on the bridge.

And my heart breaks with the collective SNAP of all mothers listening to this story at  
work, in the kitchens, theirs cars....  
mouths a gap, hand covering lips and teeth.

Because imagine-  
though you don't want to,  
driving home from daycare as the eery green sky backlit with an unseen sun gets darker  
and darker  
and darker.

Traffic slows as too many people rush to outrun the wind and storm but they are all too  
late.  
Traffic stops.

The mothers heart is pounding as the bridge sways.  
She looks in the rearview mirror and her baby is staring out the window  
transfixed  
as the clouds descend.

She must hold her.  
She unbuckles her seatbelt and climbs over the seat.  
She unstraps her daughter who then clings to her chest with tiny hands taking in tiny  
fistfuls of shirt. She buries her face in her chest.

The car is rocking now.  
The metal bridge moans.  
Around her cars take off like they have just discovered the secret of flight-  
she closes her eyes.

There is already so much noise around her she hardly notices the sound of her own  
windows breaking.  
Mother and baby are sucked out with the empty slurp of a vacuum.

Do they look at each other in bewilderment?  
Just for a moment, do they feel the exhilarating weightlessness of flight?  
The release of gravity.

It is over quick, I imagine.  
Like the assumption of Mary they are pulled into the sky-  
and drift peacefully away.

Weeks later I am home with my children-  
and watch as blocks of color cross county lines on the weather channel.  
It is a tornado warning for our small town.

I think of my infant daughter asleep upstairs -  
I imagine the roof torn away as she is sucked  
cradle and all

into the sky.  
I feel sick.

But the reporter sounds excited  
not terrified  
and is already announcing the dissipation of the threatening cloud.  
I tuck my kids into bed  
with hugs and kisses and reassurances of  
"It's fine,"  
and  
"dont worry."

I smooth the hair off their foreheads,  
turn on their fans to blow away the heavy, sticky air-  
I know the worst will not get us today.

### *Illusion*

Unawareness  
sculpted, perfected.  
Coated with layers of bliss  
and nonchalance.  
She sings, walks, dances, laughs, talks, flirts - carefree. Effortless.  
Wraps it in a warm blanket of confidence  
just out of the dryer.

Observing males are pulled as if by force  
to this woman who is at ease with herself  
from the skin behind her ears  
to the small hairs along th ridges of her  
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He imagines going to bed with this comfort-  
and waking up beside it.  
He hopes her security is contagious and rubs up closer  
for a bit of this magic.