

come now, let's sit in what light is left

Out here I can believe
this world isn't going to end
or not yet. Or not

here, that the painter
in the garden harvesting the last
spring kale, the giant white dog

gentling against the blue
house, the clamor of chickens
and this sweetly

creaking tree swing will go on
and on, so even as riots and ocean
consume all the lilacs

but these, some bright
impenetrable sphere
will form around this now

of the blooming hostas
and wind ruffling the pine
branches, the high-up

dialogue of starlings
as evening's April chill
strolls in. I know

this world is going
to end, I feel it
in the concrete

and guttering light.
But there is
a yellow chair

here, facing the trees,
and I will sit in it and ask you
to come closer, to bring

yard violets and sweetgrass
to burn and ask you
once again to forget.

fuse

In the photograph I do not have of us
we are lying on a mattress in an otherwise

vacant apartment. It's clear from the angle
that one of us has taken the shot, the way lovers do

in moments of happiness, to preserve
something of it or to show off to their friends

or just to know what they look like, lying there,
before anything's exploded.

love in the Late Holocene

Since the beginning of time it's gotten hotter and hotter and now, just when I'm beginning to get comfortable, it's all starting to stop. Boys with flashlights and folded tents approaching. You say *the beginning of time* and mean a theory about planets. I mean I mean, something about humans being molecules mashed together whether they like it or not. Some watches must be worn to stay wound. Our kitchen clock is one hour and every day a few more seconds behind thanks to daylight savings, batteries invented to go obsolete, and our laziness or unwillingness to pull over a chair. Once, in the middle of a storm, tornado sirens blaring, some men the next camp site over tried to help us take down our canopy and tent. Cell phones for flashlights, and your headlamp through the rain. In the morning, a twisted giraffe of metal testified to our shared failure. It's not that I want to be alone, more that this human suit is so molecularly dense and prone to sadness. Lights moving through a ripe field. Some cold encroaching fog.

apocalypse lipstick

How shall we pretty for this ruin? Day into day
the core fails, the words dissemble, the flowers
push their gaud faces up through the crushing
season. Fuck it. Let's costume the dissolution
with brilliance. Let's train ourselves
like the slow slow dying to see

only light. Only the dim slumped sun
gushing into the next busted eon.
Take the ordinary raw from my mouth,
the gummy meat of this flaccid tongue.
Bring on the garbled bargainers of Wall Street

and State. Here are my very best boots. Here
is my weeping in the corner of the old tea shop.
It feels so late. Here where the moon's out
all through the day. Here where opus is not
being dead yet. So late in the early

of the death century. So combustible, these
minutes, this language of sticks and baubles.
Bloom! Fake that the dust is confetti and not
shredded bone. Join the dialogue
of zeroes. Our painted mouth-holes. Code

and the constant siren lullaby. The half-life
of gunpowder is forever. Half that if it's caught
on film. Half that if the revolver's PD-issue.
Half that fired into Black. Half that fired
into space where men would be if we rubbed
our feet against the floor until lightning

starred. The sun's a gun in the maw
of the planet, all of us clocks now
showing how late late the hour,
how horror-gorgeous. All the sparks
lighting the midday dark, our faces
constant as plastics. Marked

by what we cherished. An unlatched zoo
of prophets whistling through
our tooth-holes. Can you hear me,
back across the wretched decades,
the broken cosmos? I want to say

we are still here. That a man
feeds his lover in the train station
remainder and it's still a spell against
the nothing. Our children are altars,
but also we call them flowers. Once
we were monsters. Once we were
human. Once we flew.

West Barry Street

I love the ordinary doingness
of things, the man in an olive
green jacket putting a shovel

into the trunk of his clean
gray car, leaving it open.
The redhead hustling

across the street, the stroller
in front of her bumping
over the curb, the white dog

roped to the playground fence
facing the other direction. Coming
back, the man puts in a folding

chair, another, a woman
joins him, her tan jacket
flapping, she zips it, they drive

away. Someone jogs past
as if it were her natural pace,
without effort or strain. Why

a shovel? It was red. Headphones
are getting larger again, as are strollers.
My best friend's cat had one ear

removed entirely, and it doesn't seem
to notice or mind. My astrologer says
sometimes you burn enough karma to get

a pass life, an easy ride. Last night
our neighbors to the east
had a party, the stoop abuzz

in stilettos without coats, and I thought
of going over in my house clothes
to say hello and offer blankets

or tea, but they didn't seem
to be feeling the cold. I went back
to my work and texting

with a friend whose wife made
a terrible mistake, the noise
from the party a backdrop

of garbled babble and laughter,
wind against the windows,
the occasional casualty of glass.

supplication with grimy windowpane

I don't know what I'm supposed to do about the lost.
I sweep and sweep. The taxes are put away, and the hats
stacked brim to brim. The rubber ball on the radiator

just sits there. I'm alive, I'm sorry, I'm not sorry.
In the bath, my body is massive: thighs, big toes, every
pointy hair. We're out of wine. Remember when the water

was a sanctuary? Come closer now. This is the part
where I tell you what's behind the glass to which
I've pressed my entire body, pink

from the bath; this is the part where you tell me how many
of your teeth are dead, where you left the cowboy
hat you pinched from the head of your sister's

outgrown doll. It's quiet here now. Give me something
I can chew on, long into the evening. An architecture
for this salt house. This bony, birdless pen.

radio silence, WENZ, WJMO, Cleveland

I start down the road but I'm the road. Or
the stripes on the road. White. Edge-
indicative. A professor says, the history
of American music is Black history. He says it

to get a rise out of us but it's true. Or might be
as true as anything. He's teaching poetry
to a room of grad students paying
out the nose for degrees their parents
and other practical people know

to be without use. A road is practical.
Stoplights, guard rails, signage
regarding the merging of lanes:
practical. As a kid I learned

about the safety on a gun. A red button
pushed to keep it from firing. I learned
on a BB gun. For killing bats
in the family cabin. I presume
all guns have safeties, but I don't know

a lot about them. I know it's easier
to aim when you're afraid. I know
how fear rises up from the knees, how it runs
up through the gut into the hands. I started

down this road and now I'm the road so
here: a man waited 1.5 seconds
to shoot a Black boy playing
with a toy gun. The man
was a white man. Police

man. The boy was 12, was Tamir, is
dead. The history of guns is a history
of safeties. I start down the road
but I'm the gun. I start

down the road but I'm the person
on the phone calling 911. I say it
to get a rise out of me. I say something
about safeties. Something about
Tamir's sister tried to run to him

but was tackled and handcuffed
while he bled out from the gut
on the playground. It's important
to say this. It is a thing my people

did. The term *paying out the nose*
has its origins in a Danish law
whereby delinquent taxpayers
were punished by having
their noses slit. It's history. In an area

with a history of avalanches, signs
are posted: Falling Rock. In an area
with a history of murder, streets are named
after assassinated Black leaders. When I say

a history of murder, I do not mean music
though white men love murder ballads.
I do not mean music though frat boys
use Lil Wayne lyrics as an excuse
to say the N-word in public. Years ago

a man told me the history of American music
is Black history, and I believed him.
Turn it up now, whatever station it is.
I don't know how to end this.

the sacrament of hope after despair

How many men must we survive? The fortysomething at the screen door when I was 15. Roses on the porch whenever Dad was out of town. The one who tried to rape me. The other one who tried to rape me. The one who lied and dissolved and lied and dissolved and lied until I left, then followed me home to lie again. The one who made me and broke my mother's heart. The ones with the perfect syllables concealing machetes. Getting hard pursuing ruin. The ones with the gun racks and sweet guitars. The ones rolling promotions in their suit pant pockets like loose change. The ones who lisp Audre Lorde quotes over top-shelf bourbon as if the beds they rose from to come here aren't full of women who used to have hands. Not all men, but enough. Enough.

Oh my nephews. Oh my godson.
You do not have to be women
to be kind. Look at your fathers, wounded
by their own fathering, how they make
tea and hold you. Destroying
nothing. Killing no one.