

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.