Dear Suburb,

I’m not interested in sadness, just a yard as elder earth, a library of sunflowers battered by the night’s rain. When sliced wide, halved at dawn, I see how you exist, O satellite town, your bright possibility born again in drywall and the diary with the trick lock. For years I slept with my window cracked open, wanting screen-cut threads of rain. Blind suburb, dear untruth, you who already know what I mean when I praise every spared copse, you were my battery, my sad clue, but after I mowed the lawn and watched robins chesting for seeds, I couldn’t resist what hung in the toolshed where, with a pair of garden shears, I cut all the hair from my arms. That need, that scared need to whiten or clean a surface: plywood or lawn, and the spywall behind which I stood, stock-still, and sinned against the fly’s flyness. Though you live inside me, though you laid eggs in the moisture at the corners of my eyes, I still dream about your sinking empire twenty feet above
sea level, and the many things
you fail to see: beautiful bleached
gas can, tomato posts bent into art,
how half of a butterfly, cut crosswise,
still looks like a butterfly, etc.
After de Tocqueville

_Rather the ice than their way_, said Eric the Red. Or think of Cortez, who burned his ships on a Mexican beach so his men couldn’t mutiny and cruise home. We’re happiest when drinking and dancing and giving our daughters away. Our people waited on landings to board packet ships and steamers. They clapped to a fiddle or handmade drum wherever the sea tang was bracing,

then sailed not for cities of gold or to scan panoramas but to bugger up drinks and dance. This land is our land and your land and such. If you go back and read the accounts, there are many entries about the wind. Must nostalgia walk like a prince through all our rooms? Every Coyote leading a pack over the border knows it’s not the tale that pleases,

it’s the telling. Satchmo backstage, mopping his brow, said, _In every city I’ve gotta hear lions roar._ There’s this sense we’ve ravished every petal from Columbus’s flower. Maybe we’re better off when our heroes are personal, when they fade in the fumes of the Moose Lodge
or die in a shoebox of Polaroids on a closet floor. We’re happiest when drinking and dancing, next happiest in leisure, then work, then prayer.

In every anthem we hum at the stadium, caps at our sides, we ignore crops wasted, vacant stores. Why do we love the apocryphal—a cherry tree falling—but forget the Choctaw sending money to feed the starving Irish just sixteen years after the Trail of Tears?

Wherever we came from, we left mules and gulls behind. But somehow we swept rain into our disposition. We feel clouds gathering—miles above the sugar-beet region and agro-farms based in Topeka. Did they ever exist, de Soto’s green fountain or the threshed abundance on Cather’s floor? Newer, faster. Behind our heat is a fever. Even in religious fervor, said our prince Walt Whitman, there’s a touch of animal heat. Maybe only a truly great stranger can see it. Said Kerouac to Robert Frank, You got eyes.
On the Bullet Train from Hiroshima

A hundred-fifty through the paddied fields.
It’s not the speed that unnerves me,
it’s this feeling I get when I look through

tempered glass. Fishermen hunched on buckets.
Forests of trees with their skins peeled back.
It’s hard to believe we’ve tweaked the physics,

pared friction from sleek machines—
like this porpoise-nosed engine hushing the rush.
Even my seat on the aisle seems pleased

with its shape. It’s my privilege, I guess,
to relax, if I can shake the calm memorial:
children in the galleries, on the walls

pictures framing the smoke and wrack.
Chains of paper swans. Melted cameras.
A kimono’s pattern burned into a woman’s back.
Letter to Shara in Amman

A tree of despair grows inside me, strengthens, on days like today when I’m the worst kind of lazybones and Olivia naps in my lap. Outside, birds chip the air. I should be raking leaves. While pushing the stroller this morning I felt the welling of materials around me—airbrushed cars, a half-caned chair by the curb—and paused when I saw a blue jay flattened on the street. I wondered how you’d write about its colors splayed faux-angelic, its runty raptored bones. I’ve always envied how you chance upon a scene and make a tiny biography of its things. Soon you’ll lie near a desert shore and with your new son look a long way up into the sky. Where’s your city? Do the mosques admit you? When I was young I saw everything through a lens of faith. I can’t explain what I was looking for beyond the animals—God maybe. It had something to do with my divided self. Crazy Hart Crane had it right: My only final friends—the wren and thrush, made solid print for me across dawn’s broken arc. That communion, that awe—I crave it, but all I can do is watch football and stroke Olivia’s hair. Last fall, a few moments after she was born, I cut the cord. The scissors shook in my fingers. I didn’t feel the surpassing power I’d expected. Flowers arrived from nowhere. She slept. I miss California where we drank good coffee
and always talked about grace. Now I stroll over the painted moisture of the leaves. There are too many days when we can’t be done with anything, when we \textit{dwell}, but soon our children will grow and point to things, and remind us that a rabbit’s child is a bun, and a bird’s child is a chick, and a worm’s child is two worms, and a sky can have as its child a forest, and a river can have as its child a sea.