

MOTH

The soul, as we know, is a gray moth
at the center of the brain. When we're awake,

it sleeps, which makes some people think
it isn't there. When we sleep, though, it leaves us

through an ear. The things it sees,
the thoughts it has outside, are *dreams*.

Once, during a World Series game,
a lost soul slipped into the pitcher's ear.

Unable to choose what pitch to throw,
he dropped onto the mound, clawing his head,

and had to be sedated until—as doctors tried
to bat it down—the soul fluttered away.

Sometimes two souls fly together for a while.
The owners say they are *in love*; they say,

soul mates. Sometimes these mates may
lose each other in the dark or, for some reason,

fly together no more. Then the two people
feel sad, though one always feels sadder.

When we die, the soul waits until no one's
looking, then flies out the least obvious ear—

not to heaven, only to the nearest
tree, where it settles on a leaf (if there aren't

leaves, a twig will do), and seeps inside.
This is why children rake leaves into mountains

to slide down, and why men fire up
a pile of leaves on a cold day, and stare

into the blaze, and will say only, "I like
the smell." "I like the heat." "I like the light."

WINTER SONG

After a summer that sipped iced tea on my lawn
past Halloween, then a fall that barely unpacked
its bags, and then was gone, winter's arrived
like my new son, shaking fists and blustering.

Dadhood's hard work; but so was slogging
through each hour, pushing my extinction
like a big, stalled car. When I push my boy's
blue stroller now, he magically pulls me.

Even dirty diapers lighten my load. Of course
he can't stop Age from trying to smother me.
That's why I run outside to seize more oxygen.
The wind is generous; it showers me with leaves.

Its burly shoulders roll trashcans around the yard
as I pluck up the golden fruit blown off
our bucking guava tree. My goosebumps stand
and praise the cold. The wind helps me.

My city's slanty angle to the sun helps me.
My son helps me to see: What looked
like knife-edged cliffs are bunny slopes
I ski down easily. What felt like freezing

turns warm after a while. What felt like fear
is just anticipation. Pain is foreplay to pleasure.
Nothingness is Something New. Death will be
the earth's arms reaching out to cradle me.

THANKS AGAIN

for Y.K.

to you, girl in the blue Mercedes. If I hadn't drifted
left, toward you, the blue-gray blur that sideswiped me
on the right—a jolt, a sound like a milk carton dropped
from a height, a gouge the length of my Volkswagen bug—might

have flipped me like a turtle, or shoved me under a bus.
Thanks, also, to Motorhead; your CD speed-metaleed me up
just enough that, when the SUV ran the red at Jefferson,
it T-boned my pickup's bed, totaling my truck, not me.

Thanks to the cars lined up between mine and the drunk's
white van that, doing 80, slammed into us—all stopped
at a light—shoving me into the intersection where, thanks
to many other drivers, none hit me. Three gangbangers

from Reagan High who threatened to *chinga* Rudy's mom—
thank you for being hard to find the night Rudy and I prowled
Houston's streets the way our pals patrolled jungles
in Vietnam, where—many thanks, Asthma—I never had to go.

Thanks to my reflexes the day, on the 101, I watched
a dropped muffler—clipped by a big rig—rise and hover
like a UFO until I realized it was whizzing right at me.
I swerved, then BLAM!—the thing knocked off my side

mirror as cleanly as that artillery shell clipped Bobby
Hillendahl's left hand, which spun away (he told me)
like a ceiling fan. Thanks to some guy (I want to think
it was a guy) for eating light the night before the remnants

of his meal dropped from a plane at 20,000 feet, froze
in the sky, and slammed my Honda Civic like a meteor.

That's the one way I can explain it: my wife and I driving
home—open highway, cave-black woods on either side,

no other car in sight, when, WHAM!—as if a huge hand
had slammed down. No blood, no feathers, no rock fragments
or pinecones when we pulled over. Just a dented roof,
and a familiar smell.