

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 *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.