BENEATH THE TERRIBLE SURFACE

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BENEATH THE TERRIBLE SURFACE

A

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ABSTRACT

_Beneath The Terrible Surface_ is concerned with connections among people, animals, objects, and land that are important, but subtle and often overlooked. The poems are concrete and find meaning through a moment slowed down and viewed from a new angle, which ultimately conveys emotion. While moments are described, the goal is not description, but exploration. A point in time becomes important by what happens or does not happen and by what is noticed and felt by the speakers and characters. Though not always positive, they detail an awareness of the intricate, important and sometimes invisible connections between many forms of life. The collection contemplates what it takes to love a landscape, appreciate animals, and notice, react, and care for life that does not lend itself to immediate liking.
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The Terrible Surface

It takes almost a year to capture water on film, each activity suspended. Most Antarctic life unable to tell if the surface begins, or how to measure distance from light.

Everywhere temperatures lower by salt, as cold as they can, equipment breaking, numb ceilings. All of the metabolisms are slow, patient as in any world. Sponges the size of bears, jellyfish as big as barrels. These spots orbit blue icebergs and seals. In the shallows, solid particles form to anything still. Several invertebrates gather around air holes to feed on debris. Above, in white, four dogs run from pieces of a plane, pound across the frozen ground, lean movements into ice.
I. Daily
Take

In the snow-banked streets of another town, I watch a child reach her legs their length, tan cowboy boots and ice. Her arms straighten each move,

a stop, a young windmill stirring her space on the block. Her mother looks down the walk from the fogged glass door, reminds me of mine. She watches and waits and calls,

the last photo I have of her, cracked. Her face lifts from the close-up, tonight each split tree leads my eyes around the block, arranges homes into

a dozen, a collection of clarity, a slowed down Tuesday, shined familiar. I carry the picture. The hues, still, the background held shallow by her hand just above her eyebrows. The sun would have been cadmium, the location ochre. I remember the traction: face, hands, eyes, a child. When I imagine it, it’s right, up-close. I touch it.
All Evening

The woman catches fireflies and crickets from the open bathroom window, turns the light out. Some of the insects find their way to the sink, others click against her mirror. She imagines new ways night could spill itself, like water, over her, body, a paleness even in bath, can almost hear each drop of water unfolding on her skin. The neighborhood, flat behind the white tiles begins to arrange itself in evening. She listens. Kids call each other, wind unsteadies houses, and cicadas rail. The woman pokes small rounds of water on her knee, watches them blow down her calf. The sky gives itself up.
This Place I Look Out

When I cup my hands loosely around my son’s ears, so close to not even touching him, if you saw, and wanted to know what I was doing, I’d say

his body, asleep, makes me think of tree ears, how much they listen to at night--cars shutting down,

ice starting a slope in the leaves, or the hall light pressing my son’s yellow room. Some nights, I go outside and photograph

the slowness of November. Other nights, I stare just in case I can see what has made the trees move.
At Half-Past Eleven I Remember How Bright The Stars Were

*lines from Wallace Stevens' letters*

I kept inside past the deluge of rain,
a heavy fog filled with mist,
ox-blood, chicken-blood, black
glaze, myself.

The weather cleared.
They are showing Chinese
and Japanese jades and porcelains.
Cucumber-green, camellia-leaf

apple-green, moonlight blue.
Connoisseurs return from pits of antiquity
with rarities. They make honest
everyday life look like a seamstress

by the side of Titian’s daughter. Enclosed
is money for your ticket and Pullman.
It is a little more than necessary,
infrared. Improve it.
Statue From Java

All solid
next to bookshelves and cacti

he sits still
all day
his carved legs
crossed, and chin
jutted straight,
wooden fists
clenched waiting
for bad in wind,
people, weather

or day. Each night
I hear him
stretch wooden joints,
climb down over
the T.V., land
on splintered pads

of feet toward doors
and dirt. On the deck
he catches fireflies,

holds them, fiber
in his palm,
watches the glow.
Actualities

Around midday, the women each carry palettes of dough to bake in the oven in the next village. Cevizlik holds them whenever the fault drops roads. They walk.

Some of the walks are walked each day, big clips through blocks stained by algae, ash, or children who follow hoping to give directions. The North Anatolian Fault shakes dirt. The dried out dogs lie down in mud, do not smell the dough or perch their heads at women.
Each In Chennai

February prevails,
and the sloping sun
strikes movement,
a body after goats.
Purple cloth and rusted
bells fringe canvas,
understand edges of gold
turn green. Even
the cows know those
dying are not equal.
Everyday rattles awake

at the side of dust roads.
Elephants are wide-eyed,
deep within the day.
If you ask them how
life comes back again
and again, they’ll look
to their feet, not explain
the happiness
of farmers who claim
their acres roll
into day, raise grain
past women
whose strong arms
answer time out loud,
repetition smudged
by frayed hems, water
to wash hands in.

Vagabond dogs go to lunch
at a cement spot,
cubed and swept, next to one
woman selling flowers
no one seems to buy.
Their hues indigo,
fish, and red
trail air. A visitor counts
colors as moving flags,
words too many to carry
music, or articulate minutes
of connections she swears
she makes, eyes met, aged. Hundreds pass.
So Much Morning

Broken by tight wrists, 
stiff legs, and walks 
to the car, Luke opens 
the door to his wagon, stoops 
into himself, stilled 
by the early hour. He slides 
a cigarette to light, 
calls Ruff, his Fox Terrier 
to get out of the road 
and stay out. He folds 
a napkin over the lid 
of a coffee cup, 
can’t remember anything 
but to drink the coffee.

How many times mornings, 
like this, sectioned 
and timed got him 
to Manpower Plant to cut 
insulation blocks silver, 
square. The road watches 
him today circle Catula 
Avenue again and circle.
Fog Tok-Tokkie

The beetle steps his name,
prints that shift like chalk
would shift coloring the Namib

Desert. He takes a syncopated
trek up a dawn sand dune
and, all around him, his dry legs click.

When there is no more top to reach,
he propels his rear and back in an upward angle.
Condensation ends at the desert’s edge,

rolls down the shelled slope
into the beetle’s mouth,
the morning, specific and sand.
Mzima Springs

At night, the hippos graze on nearby grasslands. Their waste gives the water organic yellow. Underwater, the hippos pinch their nostrils, hold out water, their footsteps stir wreaths of dung. Insects, food for snails, hide here. Four groups of hippos loll all day groomed by fish. Barbus, concerned for excess, clean cracks in soles of their feet. Cichlids graze tail bristles. Specialized, this one feeds the next, animate by parasites and old skin.

When they die, their bodies become other food. At main pools, Garra clean wounds, mow algae from turtles' shells. Scorpions who hide in dung, grasp carp with their forelegs.

Larger fish are taken by the darter, a snakebird, cocking its thin neck, a strike.

Beneath water, hippos open up mouths, splay their feet near Labeo and doze, clean.
II. Midwest
Preening

Three remain: the lesser, intermediate, and greater Sandhill Cranes. They wintered in West Texas or on the Pecos River in New Mexico.

The massed birds above me labor through wing beats and scan sandbars for some treeless place. They will feel safe enough, next to silt and openness, to land.

While pointing to one spot emptied of birds, a man once asked me why the cranes’ red crowns band neatly every time. I couldn’t answer him; the sky that day ran like melted wax, the ground so green, so perfect, and I wanted to hold on to what he’d said, the cranes’ calls fading over a flood plain. At dawn,

the cranes run their bills over each primary feather to oil, mend tears. The birds may not anticipate how the ground needs them,

needs us, delicate bones fossilizing to fauna. Movements must be so careful, so precise to extend forward fifty-five million years.
Leaves In Prairie Fire

The immediacy of watching fields burn, thin bright lines on a broken prairie, makes Luke glad, so he drives his truck.

Neighbors tell him the Flint Hills look best growing or greening in scattered turns. Luke insists: smolder and black. He hides the neighbors' voices in the pockets of his overalls.

Once, when he was young, he tried to paste a leaf back to its branch. These March nights, Luke clings to lines of orange and beaten bluestem. He follows his breath in smoke, understands dirt and burning.
Bone Road

In Sun City, he'd heard
animals walk their trails, dirt
that holds remains of other animals.
He looks for a road
held together by wolf bones.
He's heard old men who hunted
buffaloes and wolves a hundred years ago

built the bones into a road
wide, hardly long.
Their camp
paused for wolves.
To see wind
he picks up pieces
of ground small, uneven. Falling

from hands the pebbles knock
like chimes. Someone's good bet
probably covered the road
before he was born.
He walks, looks,
walks and waits
for a rabbit to skirt a trail.
Grasslands

I.

NODDING THISTLE

Moving with the hills
the stem's thin body
takes the wind.

Below,
Limestone this orderly
predictable,
given dry.

II.

CAPSULE

Along McDowell Creek
the roads are quietly at work,
a yellow line
centering the highway.
Day then home
they said he drove
to his job against the direction
of water,
evening, forward, in stride
with the creek.

He couldn't imagine his life
interrupting the drive.

III.

KONZA PRAIRIE

Seeking a beginning to the morning
I walk across a dirt trail
the familiar, rolling light
sketching the ground.

The day becomes scenery,
dry needlegrass and
blue grama, open sky
bending.
Rotted Tornado

In the school hallway,
kids bend their necks
beyond the call of recess.

Out west, a train holds down
tracks, heading straight.
Newspaper, plastic bags
move in direction.

Nothing shapes. The man
looks out his window,
wonders if his daughter
had lunch. He sees

an opossum chew wood
chips left for landscape.
A long observing
did not bring him storms.

Outside he collects
scraps of wood, watches
a car sink mud,
a tree’s long movement.
Where The Wind Begins On The Konza Prairie

The sky dips west into landscape
protected in gray and brown silhouettes.
Branches nudge a dead wall of air, stagnant
and upholding. The leafless assume wet
movement, ease into the first breath of wind
bearing ability to tap, rename
evening with Colorado air and send
several worn-out minutes through Kansas, fake
pendulums that stagger, flutter and speed
radio waves of thunderstorm warnings
west to Alma, a town with smoked reeds
littered on the plains. Raindrops split and torn
clench purple and wake horses in thin walls.
Cows scatter with the wet leaves.
Midwest Patterns

They constantly move: wet grass in spring, beginnings in orange and green, then, burnt beyond seasons. So much silence below the grass. Landscape tries to leave behind the year, its past. Nothing on the ground is careful. The prairie shifts its own landscape, more visibility, grasslands, a silent routine. I’ve read the Konza is detectable several hundred miles in space, lengths astronauts use to orbit the earth. Boundaries show up as roads outlining the south, north, east, and western edges, a fullness next to grazed pastures. Here is both time and space. I picture it in one form: illuminated hills, tall grass, light limestone here and there, forests that are not always trees. Specificity, over time, becomes lovely. By space, borders lay in blocks, threaded into the ground, definition by distance. The lines are graceful, specific, ready to keep stretching, to be mistaken for stillness.
The Man And Woodstork

All week they smooth drying swamp.
Around bulldozed paths, clean
house-widths, some frames already in
mud almost imagining arrowhead,
pickerelweed, saw grass that once took over.

He was on the boardwalk. Quiet, sometimes
talkative, later on the observation platform. Together
we watch the way each observes, the cypress
move an emptiness as if to invite something
to nest. Artificial foraging ponds, circles of bright

monotony, end water with land. Perfect,
as close to an egret or hawk, a solitary
woodstork spirals no higher than the water tower
into a cypress. His dark gray bill rests on his neck
like our chins wait effortless on our hands.
III. Character
Dissolve

A woman in town
goes for a walk. Mud,
past the post office
sheds the road to dirt,
weights her shoes.
The Malamute Saloon
dusted open, May,
the rattle, the days
in voices. She sits
on a rock down
the road, listens
to ravens, the syncopated
chords of banjo
knocking someone’s
thumbs a little too twang.
For Hope He Hangs His Hat On The Wall

On Saturdays, Luke drives
to the edge of town, pulls
over not far from a highway pass
over water. He walks
the river, a line to an orchard,
to cows in the adjacent field.

Blown engines and backyard businesses hang rust
on the bank. Here, he pauses always to talk himself
out of letting the yards look too human. He searches for locust

shells, or catalpa leaves. Cotton seeds and phlox hit waste, path apart,
send these walks from Fair Trail and copper water back to the truck. Rusted portions of hope line backyards. Days come together,

like raking, then spray apart. The work of watching the river becomes home.
In the slightest wind, it shakes.
Annual

The ridge and trees give
bigness, a smoke so clean
town wraps itself
without leaves. At distance
and land, horizons shift
fire, build rocks of spruce,
fir, grosbeaks, or moose.

The man stops at a stone
monument, just off
the Parks Highway, holds
pieces of ground, tosses
them over the ridge.
The smoke stays
silent as he grabs another
fistful of dust. It gives
his nails dirt, the ground nothing.

He’s moved rocks, carved
the necks of roads, mile
and mile to dirt. Some dirt back
to ground, layers on skin
or covers his boots.
Its location luck.
He stands still.

Below, ants are busy
with ground, moving
through valleys and roads.
Their minutes speed,
closeness with each tenant.
Their air built
of exhaust, beige and sifted,
does not need
to begin or end.
Waving At An Airplane

People in town believe
Luke never leaves. He offers
to fix their plumbing, paint
a wall. He sits at his east window
toward the road, watches up.
He keeps closed boxes,
photos on bookshelves,
animals and people

he’s loved, but doesn’t
look at. Stacks he walks
past out the door at dawn
to catch newness, a hawk or tree,
a dog, an occasional plane.
Three women in town
gaze by his house
on their way to teach

at Meadowlark Elementary.
Some days they wave, believe
they understand his sitting.
Each Monday they sit

at blank talks,
district #305 meetings.
No one, not even Annelle
by the door, leaves quickly.
In Front Of The Scoreboard

Each left fielder has passed by the manual scoreboard. Like Williams or Yastrzemski, they knew they could center themselves in front of a ball banked off metal. At tin, it would always drop, cement fed it to field as if to communicate it could have hit a bolt. Joe Daley first opened the door in the scoreboard thirty years ago, rolled up his sleeves to a wooden stool, metal number plates, muffled lights, a square space, already smelling old.

Each night, through the cracks, Joe scans a spillway of green and left field. The lights that skirt Fenway now took some getting used to, as did changes of players from the 70s to 90s. The bright lights create the park in paint painted over. They hold an inconsistent pulse of players measured in numbers. He’s held the same slanted plates that fork through the board tonight. Thirty years, piling up nights into digits, rust from brown to green, he looks out at fans who sit in familiar seats, holds life there, as if looking out at water.

Managing the scoreboard into levels of at bats, hits, or runs, is like delivering mail. The slits of people through the board, anticipation. Creases of this job smooth into Boston and night. Daley feeds on landscape, takes in a distilled version of players.
Early On This Block

In her backyard, Ann leans into the thick light of morning, sees reflect in the window the red bands from wings of a group of blackbirds, finished stepping their feet over seeds dropped on the deck steps. Their swift reflections bend her house forward.

Holding just over Carl’s place is a group of barn swallows he couldn’t see through the window. From the garage, they lift forward down the street, leaving Carl to stretch in still light. He leans one long motion to his feet, looks over at his maroon and worn Asics by the steps.

Jackie opens her front door and knocks her feet on the wad of newspapers on the steps and heads to her car, forward through the big wheel, soccer ball, and jagged group of toys she always clips even in the light. She waves to her kids through her fogged side window.

Today, Mrs. Synder has cleaned her porch. The usual group will meet for coffee at eight-thirty. The four wooden steps to her house have been swept for twigs, the triangular window on her front door, welcoming. The feet of her white cocker spaniel, light and washed. She watches the clock hands check forward.

Leland rocks on his porch, the carpeted steps and floor quiets his movements. From this window, across the street, he looks happy, with a cup of tea in a large, light-colored plastic cup. Jackie may phone him with a group of ideas later. Watch the children. Now he looks at his feet on the new carpet, looks up at the trees flailing forward.

Carl runs by in a maroon and gray sweat suit. His feet are stuck in this motion seven days a week, a group of biweekly jogging partners he left. The light of the morning, the jog going past, and the window from the living room pleases Leland. The forward energy lets him sit and count tree sparrows that land on his steps.
A collection of sparrows' feet click a group of seeds hanging light in a flat feeder by the window of Ann's house, just over the front steps. They move to the next house, forward.
Growing

Luke’s grandmother tumbled out of a boat at sixty-five. Grabbed onto retirement, she says, like a sunflower seed grabs onto wetness then peels its shell away. Variations in dust and Florida air, made her hungry to grow avocados, sit in a white plastic chair, paint rocks for her grandson Luke.

Forty stones line the shelves above Luke’s headboard. He groups rocks in purples, blues, and greens, imagines they patch a hole in the wall to the Galápagos. Luke gives his dog extra coin-sized rocks. She keeps them next to her dinner dish and newspaper picture of a local squirrel.

Luke gathers his rocks into a bag he unloads on the bathroom scale. Fifty-five pounds makes him feel strong. He tells his grandmother. She laughs, twists the top off a bottle of ginger-ale. They cheer another dark night.

When Luke turns thirteen, he’ll pile the rocks into his backpack, sit towards the Gulf of Mexico, toss each one out, to see how it looks underwater.
How Many Times Her Shirt Caught The Wind

Helsinki, Malmo, and Reykjavik
each took her west
as a dim band of light.
Moving each year
would make a girl age or complete.
At forty-seven, she considers
each town a place to settle part of herself,
like sediment.

Today, she watches Nome pose
in white, frayed solitude.
Her attention curves
in downtown’s iridescent air.

She hopes to love Nome.
That thought buffers stillness,
buzz from humming birds
who flailed around her family name
carved on the house in Maine.
Those days seem rhythmic
compared to drinking coffee in town
with a brown dog whose thick claws
knock the frozen ground.

She tells herself
the years are not paraphrases,
wonders how it would feel to live barefoot,
callous her feet.

Alaska mornings sharpen
like vinegar in a bowl.
People in town sit at coffee shops,
tell her she shouldn’t miss
places she’s never visited.
The Basics Of Seeing

Caroline says it must happen slowly
after great movement, when the rotation
of the lens pieces with the hand. That moment
on the plain when the elephant pulls its legs lightly
over the ground, a younger gray body to the side
of the older, like large wildflowers at the edge of a road.

In her car, she feels steadied, a type of balance
with all of the years it took her to get here. Nested and still,
silent on the dirt road. Through the telephoto lens,
she positions one elephant to a head, then an eye.

Her mind carts across the circle. The elephant moves grass
off balance. Each step gravity to her appearance.

She observes them. The way a child watches
the movement of the midwest snow,

trying to pick out which white piece to settle.
Finally, all of it, all of the field moving.
IV. Rearranging What's Here
Atlas

In a red metal cage, the black bear
lies on her back, her ears and paws
fit space between bars. If she
doesn’t hear movement or footsteps,
you could touch her. Her stomach
is shaved, one scar, tracing paper thin,
the next, pitted, open, a line to a catheter
implant. The gallbladder’s function:
to drain bile. They dry it, sell it
as medicine, a remedy for liver
disease, fever, or others, in market
stalls down the street. Or in Benin,
lined as still as in a museum, chimpanzee
heads and hands, antelope hooves, sit in the sun
for sale, each section drying radiant,
behavior, neat in rows, ending
in antlers. Some day, we’ll try to etch them
whole, pour casts into Sahara rocks,
black bears, giraffes, hyenas, maybe
chameleons. We will try to map all
their bodies, pieces in the sand.
One of us will remember the size
and stripes of a tiger, another the head
of a mountain gorilla, one a hand.
Tree Ears

Old growth extends black bear scat, huckleberry and stained. Lichens curl stitches of green, spell out something like “Fog’s a Vow to Animals,” a cough of cigar smoke across-slope. More logged cedars slump in nearby streams, lack direction, float next to a gray clay, sponge and smoke. Ashes belched to river tell the trees when to pelt burrs, microprobes to tack cuffs and sleeves of visitors. The probes will peer past the edge, into where they last checked, baroque wilderness. Wind brings the burrs back, sheds outgrowth and spines. The seeds scatter grains of glue, liquid sounds of the Forest Service destroying its own records, carving into wet cement and pages. Cedar vowel their buffer to metal and fire. Pines quiver, undo the fog, flail branches over the river, protection each morning.
Long-Tailed Voles

In the corner of the museum
I see the voles, almost frozen, nesting
linear and gray, rows so even
and still, the cotton in their mouths

and ears has them full, uncomfortable
stiff pillows. They are too ordered
in glass the size of a saxophone case
to look individual. The easiest

of afternoons, how careful
the biologist must have been. I am,
watching vole after vole, the constant
emptiness of bulged pockets,

telling one to remember its fullness,
how the grass tastes. Their short fur
neither shiny nor dull, just kept
to hold cotton. The chase must have been

long, next to birch, and below tundra,
the biologist might have loved
the woods, set down a bit of poison
from the thin plastic bag that zips.

It took days to make them look cared for,
unmovable. In the next room, a little girl
watches a bicycle suspended from the ceiling,
covered in metallic tiles, primary

panels and bits of field sealed
to the tires. Minutes before they were caught,
with all of their lives, here in the glass box. The desire to go further.
The Giant Dala Horse

The pancakes took turning
to around and some type of spinning
down over the copper coins women
banked off the feet of the Dala
horse, heading back to ground.
The only fountains they’d find,
puddles. The coins see the water,
red reflected from the paint
on the horse’s wooden statued skin.

The horse knows he gets his red
from wild lingonberries, his yellow
from pancake batter, white
inside almonds. He dreams of eating
something other than the locals’ wishes
which leak, wrinkle past paint
and sit on the ground like scorpions
ready to stick and sting.
Bargains With Dumpsters

The guy who collects
glass sits in his chair, tilts
two legs by the brown
board building. If a dumpster
gets heavy, he'll walk
to hear high pitched remarks
of glass, easy breaks
on metal bins.

Every morning, he watches
each person drop trash,
pulled out the backs
of cars, tossed in, or on,
or next to older trash,

plastic bags, bed frames,
glass bottles, all weight
in rusted positions.
He tunes to quantity.
A good day shows: remnants
of cleaned spaghetti jars,
green ginger ale
or vodka chipped,
cleavage in design.

He bargains with dumpsters
one bag full, colors,
no clear, a value.
He takes simply,
chooses edges
worn or curved over
straight finger length
strips, too thin, probably,
to arrange.

He drops his chair
to all legs
walks to the center of the lot
and stares middle
bin to left, left to chair.

Years of watching
the dirt parking lot
have given him easiness.
The dumpsters backdrop
the lot in lines. Each new
break and load
of glass becomes his.

Next to the chair he scatters
small triangles carefully, as if they
were grass seeds,

they fall on a bath towel
he’s laid over dirted cement.
Ostrich Egg

I work for Lou.  
He drives around Lawrence  
on his moped, keeping  
an eye out for junk. In the dumpster  
on 10th, a small deck grill,  
one rung short, otherwise  
cooks like fire. He says  
it’s a throw-away world.  
An apartment two blocks down,  
half-used bottles of shampoo,  
note pads with plenty of lines,  
folders from Geology and Speech.

On Saturday mornings  
I help Lou set up  
and sell shoes, fans, folders,  
and shirts. Always, McDonald’s  
at seven a couple coffees  
and back to the corner lot  
of Humboldt and 31st. He rents  
a storage shed for ten bucks a week.  
It holds all the toasters, basketballs,  
lamps, suitcases, shoes, note pads,  
and those Rubber Maid  
storage boxes in dumpsters.

My cousin sent me a photo  
from Cape Town. He holds  
an off-white ostrich egg  
before he scrambled half of it  
into six omelets for six people,  
threw out the other half.  
I show the picture to Lou.  
He shows me a fan that works like new  
if you prop it up against a wall.
Animal Auction

Below the catwalk a white rhino browses.
Fences skirt flat-topped acacias and plateau,
one couple checks out the horns, hook lips or square.

Everyone’s buying. From their picture window,
the couple watches rhinos grab twigs, shake their ranch.
Below the catwalk a black rhino browses,

her low hanging stomach shifts and sways, beside her
tractors unload zebras, heavy equipment.
People check out the stripes, the white, black or square.

Waterbuck run like dogs, the man with the hat
tells the woman. Wait until the next shipment.
Below the catwalk a giraffe winds its way,

people scribble notes and traits on auction lists,
the blue wildebeest the color of bold mints.
People check out the scars, folded lips or square.

The antelopes’ fast pace raises them from cattle.
The dollars go up, thirty thousand takes one.
Below the walkway rhinos sway and browse.
The people look at horns, ear tags, and hook lips.
Each elephant body pushes reeds, creeps, fruit pods. The family unfolds through straw-colored stubble, drawing rasps against the grains of dirt. In the dusk, the bodies seem like gray spotlights gathering.

Joshua, teenaged and too old for groups now, presses his head up to a yellow-barked tree. Ridges of thick skin fit. The trunk’s curvature lies over tusks, their white lines touching the ground, uprooting the acacia tree.

Joyce Poole sees them there around the old research jeep, gathering dusk to listen to her sing. She rumbles, tosses her rubber sandal. Her voice forms a loudness Joshua seems to hold in his ears. Taking air beneath the sandal he pulls in sniffs, tusks a green plastic strap, takes the sandal around his tongue.

Each angle of the shoe parts with his backward toss. His ears steady, listen to the plastic scuff the ground.

Joshua’s weight is like water in a box of steel, floor-length gray skin absorbing field. Elongated with tilt, his trunk knocks a piece of wildebeest bone.
Plywood Drive

If I were to paint outlines
of the house, tires, plywood, shed,
buses, other shed, I’d melt it
all into one white relic,
leave ash inside, move the dog
from his chain dragging the ground,
shovel the water dish reckless
with snow. As it stands, the heap
of house fixes its walls next to
Folgers coffee cans and boards.
I see it converge, a triangular gesture
resembling tree bark texture, enlarged.

Each time I drive by one more
rise or jut out of form. Its presence,
a thrown off tennis shoe, browned
banana peel, fiberglass windows
on a metal and red bus, a “Keep Out”
sign a few kids probably pried
off the neighbor’s fence,
recognizing the handwritten words,
believing what they found was theirs.
The Woman I Follow

From the bus, I'd see her dresses
shape a consistent form. Thin,
hardy a body. The old
woman's back frozen in a curve,
smoothed her neck. She held her gaze,
layered in skin and parallel lines,
over the navy blue baby carriage. Our town,
hilled and ancient, pieced to a city. So uncurious,
directed. The woman and buggy,
one form leaning up hills.

Once, I took a pencil and paper
from my bag, as if I could confirm
a focus in charcoal, establish the movement
and age of the body. I was careful
when I looked. Things so linear
never stop. She had gone further every day,
for months, all over town. Nothing brief
could rattle her pushing. Me, or,
the crooked sidewalk. All of us
interested in never arriving.
Weighing Reindeer

A fence separates the two groups of females. Their diets, lichens, occasional long stem brome, rolled barley, research. Every other day the deer gain or lose. The grain sifted and green with bits of mustard shaded shoots, like picked flowers, is always nutrition. The color sticks across their hot chins. The faucet the water comes from, ready to flow. They eat what we bring, use it for forage and salt. They walk, splayed hooves across frozen ground, plastic ear tags, individual mouths, eyes, antlers we use to steady our handling. The fence holds its division: wire squares in blocked lines, one after another into a new larger lot; we finished twisting the wire wall before winter. Its area bigger, alfalfa for animals not yet here. After each reindeer runs through the chute, we clamp her into position, weigh in kilograms.

We watch her breath exhale energy as if it reflects back to us how much we miss animals that are gone. She exits, pants.
60 Minute Abduction

Get this: She wasn’t in the papers. She wasn’t tattooed or wearing a collar. I tell the overweight dog the cat will come back, like birds
fly back. In minutes, the stray walks by. I spot the cat edging around blue dumpsters, tell the overweight dog we’ll teach the animals to live inside,
paint the floors, help us polyurethane and stain. Inside, dust starts yellow in trim bushes, a drum sander magnifying splinters and oak.
The room looks like a place hobos sit, wait for coffee or girls. We work. I hear three safe living-room cats: Sisko, Darwin, and Spenser. Each meets a destination, carves
sharp initials into Peace Lilies and Yucca. The dog and I come back with straw bales in our arms and bones arranged like trees for animals to crawl on.
I line the stray into a carrier with Lamb & Rice Science Diet, and hum to the vet’s. Four safe cats.
The zzz zzz zzz of the electric razor in the next room. One off-stroke from the vet cuts the cat’s nipple. Naked and gray,
the two-inch underside swap, a groomed tennis court, its center line indicating old spay. The overweight dog noses the gray and brown blur. Her fur parts, ashes loose on an exoskeleton of fleas.
I plot the completion of abduction there at the vets. Four safe cats drinking fountain water, door bells ring. No one’s home.
On the way out of the vet's,

I pass a charcoaled moonscape and cows, the overweight dog notices misspelled signs. I imagine neighbors asking questions. At home I lock doors, tear up a note "CALL 375-8346 BY SAT OR I KEEP HER."
Living With A Deaf Dog

All around the house, there is so much snow, the doors are frozen, the windows layered in plastic. We padded all of this, us, inside. The thinnest layer of pressure of feet on the floor, an interior, all of our walls, all of our listening. He’s walking around the house, looking out the window at hills layered in cleaness, our eleven usual horses to come in from the distance to dinner. He watches exactly the gray horse, loves the trail he sees each ordinary evening. A keen listening of the people, the feeders, the radiant day.
Rearranging What’s Here

The lot next door should separate into irises when snow melts. The landlord said they will be tall, order paths through the yard. There will be grass, but not much green. There should be improvements in the yard. I collected bags of old leaves, mixed dust bits, molded wood, dead bugs, broken bird houses, hauled them to a dump where they’ll be buried.

Under the ground nothing leaves. The small wooden dala horse I buried, in solid red, yellow, blues, and white, probably holds its colors, luck in the backyard.
A Moment In Ice

The plant light, the window.
The yard blocked in white
has moved through prairie,
grasses, abandoned, fenced, then us.

Don’t worry about the shovels
or how neat the piles fold
over more snow. These hours
we want to repeat. The house

belongs to us, the sidewalks,
a white gauze, ours to unstack.
The path up the yard, blank.
We’ve watched the day follow us

here: imagine these are not coats,
but sun. The shovels, buckets
we fill with water near elephants,
who also fill with water. The dog

up to his chest, the places we’ve lived,
better after we leave. Houses move
here, an emptiness, lifted and pressed,
collections of white grabbing air.

Light keeps the plants green,
the walkway, shoveled to ice we keep
as ice. Your movements, syllables
closer to my hands, outside for days.