

**THE SCREEN DOOR:  
A COLLECTION OF POETRY**

**Honors Thesis**

Presented in Fulfillment of the Requirements  
For the Degree of Bachelor Arts in English

In the College of Arts  
at Salem State University

By

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**On The Work:**

The following is the result of one semester's work of crafting poetry under my advisor, Professor Kevin Carey. Though the bulk of the work took place under his guidance in this short period of time, *the screen door*, my forty-three page collection of poetry, has been long in the making. My undergraduate career exposed me to the soft and alluring voice of January O'Neil, the gentle nature of Rod Kessler, the experienced mind of JD Scrimgeour and of course the honesty and rawness of Kevin Carey's work. I have learned from each poet countless skills and lessons that transcend my study in poetry. This work is a representation of my journey under their guidance.

# the screen door

felicia connolly

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*"The page is long, blank, and full of truth. When I am through with it, it shall probably be long, full, and empty with words."*

-Jack Kerouac, *Atop an Underwood: Early Stories and Other Writings*

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the last year you lived here i said

don't turn twenty  
until i've left a few  
dents.

until i've kissed you  
under  
three  
fleeting  
moon phases.

don't turn twenty  
until we've hiked  
all of Creek Cemetery.

until you've laughed  
& cried  
& came  
wearing my jacket.

until you've slept  
in my bed  
& i've slept  
in yours  
& we've slept  
in a stranger's  
together.

don't turn twenty  
until i've owned four  
trucks smoked three  
brands of cigarettes  
& have taken  
care of the melanoma  
twice.

please  
don't turn twenty  
until i've grown  
the guts to say  
sometimes i think  
you're pretty sometimes  
i want to kiss you  
& sometimes  
i need stillness.

adaptations

you are handsome  
without your  
glasses, but i  
barely know  
you this way;  
i study your sun-  
squinted gaze &  
think about your hair  
getting longer, your calloused  
skin creasing  
in my favorite stared-  
at places, while we, sinking beneath  
creekbed, act an algaed  
floor, dark & velveteen.

we ache only to be consumed by river.

what else were we  
meant for?

here,  
our feet wake

water like rocks.

## how Middle school Mattered

in the seventh grade i was best friends with corrin  
who once painted her face green just to make me smile  
&  
had to stop coming over because her dad was a Minister  
who didn't like my parents smoking cigarettes  
&  
didn't think we lived in such a good part of town.

corrin who i saw three days before i graduated  
in the hallway of our high school  
eight months pregnant.

Mom laughed when i told her; i never  
heard her cry revenge before then. i never  
realized how much she hated the Minister.

## Mom Doesn't Have to Say He's Leaving

She's searching for a starting point,  
nooked in the old kitchen,  
both hands pressing into edges  
of this year's first watermelon.

She says, "He can't even wait to move  
to start screwing around," her fingers curl  
into the softest places of skin,  
"he still sleeps beside me."

She's tip-toed & leaning,  
knife against the knuckle  
she once sliced off.  
"It's fine. I'm already happier alone."

The blade cracks countertop,  
the fruit splits & she  
is left staring at exposed,  
pink meat.

what it's like to want you

you smile at me  
through the missing  
screen door,  
at your back  
a slew  
of abandoned  
frames left  
punctured  
by my dog.

you are petting her,  
you are smiling,  
you are wearing  
your grandfather's jacket.

a month later  
in the clearing  
of Dead Man's  
Swamp a suede  
horse is spotlit  
by the construction  
lamp you keep  
bedded in your truck.

i, not knowing  
the hotline  
for the police,  
dial an emergency  
& you are frozen,  
the crest of your body  
resting on the half-  
rolled window.  
you kiss me  
that night.

then start  
the truck  
& start  
to run  
but don't.  
so we are still  
in the parking  
lot across from  
the liquor store.

it's first time  
you sleep over &  
you are drunk  
as you mumble  
to the moon,  
scared because  
you always are.

but i forgive you  
when you hiccup  
& i see  
the first sign  
you may be  
loving me.

Jessica,

in a photograph our grandmother  
has your crazy curly Qs wrapped  
between her thin piano fingers.  
her hair is short, she is as thin as  
the day i didn't recognize her  
in the hospital. i delivered her meal  
without a second glance. it was only  
the alarm in her eyes that made me  
turn back.

in the photograph you are holding a  
mickey mouse stuffed animal (if not  
the same, identical to the one your  
son bites the nose of). she looks down  
at you content, one elbow leaning on  
the edge of a pink counter i will never  
recognize because i never lived in that  
house.

in this photograph, sister, your blood  
grandmother loves you separately from  
me. before our lives were confused by  
paternity & separations & even after  
when we fought from the top & bottom  
bunks. there was a time when you were  
the only one; your existence a moment  
i can touch only as a polaroid.

my grandma pumpkin, your mother

you want to be rid of her  
because your new wife says

so

you & i stand  
in the entryway,  
one door

on either end  
as you push me out  
of the ailing room,  
in hand a breaking box  
overflowing  
with art supplies.

you say there's plenty more  
for another trip, you say  
we will hold it for you,  
you really say  
"i hope you got what  
you wanted, it'll be gone  
when you come back

for summer."  
gone like she was  
(the weekend i returned  
home my sophomore year)  
"gone," my real dad said  
on the train, "dead."

Raid & Riot in Mansfield, Mass.

“The policeman is here to help  
in case things get a bit—”  
cut short by the length  
of Alex’s mohawk,  
longer than usual  
& stained leopard print  
pink, all fourteen inches  
finish the sentence  
“out of control.”

Recent returnee of Russia,  
his two year relationship  
with the girl I have not yet  
befriended just ended,  
tension suffusing,  
waves of chords amplified  
by seven pieces of his beat  
up drum kit.

Part-time truancy officer  
Hayes watches,  
his intent electric.  
He thinks  
there will  
be trouble.

The keyboard kicks  
Hickman into a run:  
the cycle of a circle pit.  
The band plays “Booze  
Brawls, Broken Hearts”  
forcing shimmies into  
girls wearing sneakers.

Nigel mans the ticket table,  
sips from a flask.  
Two years later  
he will abandon  
my best friend  
to an abortion,  
returning months  
later hands heavy  
with the burden  
of apologizing.

A photo of her  
plastered to the hood  
of his 98 VR6 is Scotch-  
taped to the insole  
of his guitar case.

We are an orchestrated  
silhouette of flailing fists &  
stomping feet. Our encore:  
a crescendo of sirens.

Oak doors & steel toed feet  
demand entrance  
prompting Hickman's  
mosh into a mob,  
a percussion of testosterone  
flooded teens:  
a riot breaking loose.

Nigel wields a tuning fork,  
an impromptu weapon,  
he stands an interlude  
between two bodies.

Ryan, from behind, furls  
fingers onto a neck,  
is wrestled to the ground  
is found guilty of a tin  
foil pipe crumpled  
in a jean pocket.

We book for the woods,  
Chris to be arrested  
one week later  
for an unrelated robbery.

But I escape unscathed,  
& walk calmly beside a boy  
I used to be in love with.  
We are two of few  
who don't make  
the Bruised & Battered  
list later printed  
on the band's CD.

above the fold

a little boy stands still,  
the gaping wreckage of his neighborhood  
eating away the background.  
he reaches for something  
out of frame, something  
we cannot see, something  
that is probably no longer there.

three Sandy Point names  
come to mind (the only  
i can remember).  
i think of Dzokhar's brother,  
the MIT policeman who  
attended my college,  
but the boy is not reaching  
out for them. he is searching  
for lost toys & missing classmates.

the boy on the news is lost.  
he is sad & soft & broken  
the same way as you:  
orphaned early of everything  
stable, searching for something  
whole, outstretched arms  
a symbol of hope to anyone  
not looking close enough.

pulled tough

my sister & her husband glare into guts of a glass womb  
showcasing gluten & sugar free chocolates. my sister  
would please the diabetes if only she'd pick these duller,  
flatter, darker candies compared to sugar treasures of the case  
beside it: the coconut macaroons & cocoa almond delights,  
the chocolate dipped smore, later confiscated.

but i am not looking at her, or thinking about insulin  
injections of later—i am staring into you, my mother,  
standing before the cellophane window of the same  
chocolate shop while we are on vacation & you search  
for the man who is leaving us.

you stand alone on that busy sidewalk, tourists  
in the foreground, surrounded by everything foreign,  
a taffy puller in the window behind you; the taffy itself  
pink soft smooth, stretched over & over; shiny as bubble  
gum; it is you, vulnerable & on display.

the night you drank gin & tonic

i lay stiff  
beside you,  
my head  
in the crook  
of your arm.  
my hand,  
aching  
for the small  
of your back:  
old habits  
hanging  
above us  
like tree  
    branches.

a photograph  
taken downstairs:  
your face surfacing  
from my shoulder blade,  
your body slumped  
between me  
& the wall  
as you come  
to the realization  
you drank too much.  
i'm supporting  
your weight  
& mine.  
smelling your skin,  
listening to whispers  
saying "i wish  
i had stayed"  
the last words  
falling  
"with  
you."

your friends  
in the background  
ask how i deal  
but i am shaking  
my head, saying  
"it's nothing"

because they only  
hear half the story,  
only know  
there was a boy,  
disturbed,  
who stabbed drowned  
suffocated  
his mom  
& failed  
to kill her.

they have no idea  
what this story  
has to do  
with your  
inebriation.  
they've no clue  
he sat front right  
in your classroom,  
that you spoke 40  
minutes prior  
& it haunts you.

while you sleep  
i hear them whisper,  
wonder if we date  
because we sleep  
in the same bed  
all the while  
the smell of pot  
perfumes the house  
& bedposts knock.  
they only ponder  
how well our palms  
fit together.

how we fall asleep

your sister slept across  
the hall while you lay  
sweating on hardwood:  
the mediator between  
broken man & tainted niece.  
the breeze of AC through  
his handleless door knob  
no relief to the scorching  
of skin under cracked ceiling fan.

you tell me this story standing  
in the same hallway, twelve years later.  
it is the last night anyone of your family  
will step foot here.

i am reminded of nights beside  
a bed not belonging to my parents,  
wondering whether my mother would  
survive till morning & imagining someone  
holding my hand as i fell asleep.  
it was you, i think,  
reaching from cities away.

years later i lie awake in the home  
my dad sleeps in with his new girlfriend,  
even allowed the memory of kissing you  
in the snow at my windowsill; my first  
loved etched into these walls.

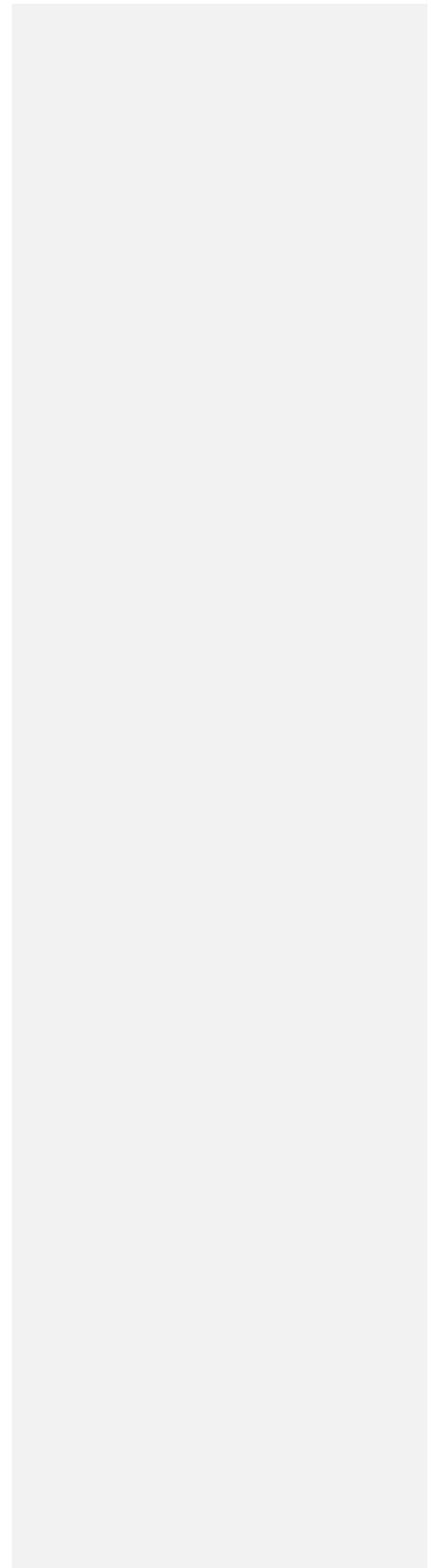
so i think of your bed, matted  
under the pane of your uncle's old bedroom  
& remember that once in our lives

we were needing & loving each other.

a matter of conversation  
*after Dean Young*

*the results of  
this test will  
be kept confidential*  
i say as we sit  
in her beat up  
blue chevy blazer.  
i am reminded  
of my first car,  
also a blazer,  
but not blue  
& even more  
bruised.  
she is sipping  
her first latte,  
my suggestion,  
& i am  
thinking  
*the results  
of this test—*  
while she  
unbuckles  
her seat belt  
leans forward  
& thinks  
(a relief  
she is 17  
& thinking).  
we are talking  
about  
Dzhokhar.  
she is saying  
“i feel bad  
for him.”  
& i am  
quiet.  
she hesitates,  
fears i judge  
her like her  
friends  
fears  
i think  
she is  
wrong

but i am  
saying  
i am  
saying  
“will  
be  
kept  
confidential”  
& meaning  
thank  
you.  
thank  
you.



the end of Massachusetts  
*for Josh Grudain & Charleen McFadden*

beach divides the cape around us, extending miles in both directions.  
we wade through waves at half-mast.

in the tide pool only one horseshoe crab survives,  
moves so slowly it could be current

but we'd just as well assume life, else every creature  
float a rotting shell or bone or gel.

a sheet of ice slips from Charleen's mouth  
& slides between her breasts.

we drink vodka & lemonade here, at the end of the world.  
the sun setting on every edge, more sky than earth.

later we will laugh & fall & learn coolers are buoyant  
when we are separated from land by 200 yards of sea.

we will piss beside the car where Josh parked  
between one sand dune & another.

we will see a fox, mistake it for a coyote & leave at last  
when the moon rises in the sky above & water below us.

on the drive home fireworks peek between mountains of sand,  
with no one else to see, we know the show is just for us.

Torrid Weather

It's freezing &  
I miss you  
but it must  
be hot in  
Mexico. So  
you won't  
be thinking  
of autumn  
weather, won't  
be thinking  
of my hands  
in your jacket  
pockets.  
It's freezing  
but I think  
of us sweating,  
surrounded  
by shit,  
shoveling  
it between  
rows of berries  
& I think  
about feeding  
"Baby"  
the goat  
who chewed  
at wooden  
benches &  
had to be  
bottle-fed.  
All this before  
we fought  
at *The Sound  
of Music*, before  
Robyn played  
a nazi, before I  
fell in love with  
eight-year-old  
Eleanor, if ever  
we had a child...

## not waving

at seventeen i almost drowned  
in the reservoir of my home town;  
before mom's intervention,  
before the second near-death car wreck.

someone should've said stop  
when i fell & twisted both ankles  
then sacrificed my jacket to the trees,  
but they didn't. so we swam, some of us  
carried, to the island half a mile out.

the first time i resurfaced i laughed.  
nicole, my best friend back then, cocked  
her head toward me, arms securing  
her to the back of a man we knew from Boston.  
she smiled, her blond hair silk in the sun.

the second time i sank, drifted  
to the soft bottom like a leaf:  
calmed by the sun rippling  
through warm water, like a bubble  
bath back when we lived in a house,  
back when we had a bath.

if i hadn't thought of you,  
of arms pulling me from the pool  
when i was two, or snow when  
i was twelve, i don't think i would  
have kept swimming.

but i survived, & sopeck, a boy  
i went to high school with, drowned  
instead a day later.

still i can't help but wonder if he never  
would have gone swimming at all  
if i had given up.

the day we found your real dad

we woke at the time  
i used to say reminds  
me of you.  
each of your mumbles  
blooming a new leaf  
on the hanging tree  
haunting  
your sleep.

we  
packed  
quick  
&  
light  
enough  
to beat the sun  
blaring  
in our eyes  
the 358 mile  
drive;

us sunbathed & sunbleached & coffeestained & sleepless.

i wish we'd stayed  
lost in New Hampshire,  
searched each empty  
wood trunk for the  
copy of my favorite  
novel you abandoned  
there for someone  
else to treasure

one day.

with a view of Holden Park

it was autumn when  
we flew that stupid  
pirate kite in the park  
of the neighborhood  
you still call the “ghetto,”  
my neighborhood.

we didn't talk  
about the kiss goodnight  
at my windowsill  
the year before  
or your wandering  
eyes slipping down  
my night gown,  
you saying,  
“I'm only a man,  
I think you forget that.”

afterward we sat  
in your kitchen,  
you showed me  
what you heard:  
    wind between  
    window panes  
    the humming  
    refrigerator,  
you asked what i heard:

sirens.

12/10/13 9:08 AM

**Comment [1]:** null:  
Felicia Connolly May 29, '13, 10:02 AM capitals

Kristie

We had been dating  
six months, you had just  
made up with your parents.

She didn't give me  
the look your mom did;  
she didn't wonder why  
I was with you.

The last time I saw  
your sister she sat  
beside me at *Les Mis*.  
I can see the styrofoam  
cup of white wine she snuck  
in for me nestled  
in the crevice  
between our chairs.

She switched seats with her  
husband so we could  
whisper between scenes  
because we liked plays  
& you didn't.

She called me the first  
time the pills took  
you to Fuller Hospital.  
I was away at school.  
I hadn't heard from  
you in two days.

She drove two hours  
to get me & we drove  
three hours to you.

She didn't mention  
the pool of puke  
your father pulled  
you out of,  
but she was  
the one who  
cleaned up the  
    shit from the carpet,  
    urine from linoleum.

She held my hand  
as they patted me  
down, as they emptied  
my pockets, as I talked to you  
through a film of plexi-glass.

I called her when you started  
stealing from me too.  
When my wallet went missing  
she didn't say "I told you,"  
but held me when the tears came  
& I said I'd given up.

brushwork

you're the type of painting  
i'd like to keep quiet,  
keep stowed in the storage  
of our basement apartment;  
the type that spits  
hues of cerulean blue  
all over the carpet.

the type kept covered  
with splotches of white,  
spilling saffron triangles  
each one an edge of your body.

the type with a few  
viridian stripes & misconstrued  
tones yelling in shades of yellow,  
in shades of our infidelity.

you're the type of painting  
i'd like to keep private  
because i'm a bit ashamed  
of the aubergine stains  
of my fingerprints  
on your canvas skin  
& the shards of broken  
promises scorching you umber.

you called from your second sober house

i like the idea of you  
living cracked  
between walls,  
stuffed between tits  
of a drag queen who  
stands half  
a foot over you.

i like that image.  
not because i feel  
redeemed  
by it, but because  
you have lived  
in the time  
we've been apart.

i like the image  
of you sitting silent  
in the attic  
of a silver-painted home  
riddled with ritalin's  
leftover children.

i like the idea  
of a different you,  
not the 6 foot 2  
junkie i fell  
in love with:  
of you weighing 160  
instead of 110  
of you smiling  
& not faking it.

cost

the man who has  
so much to do with  
my Creation  
does not remember  
how to live  
alone.

he donates  
everything  
in the kitchen  
to Salvation Army  
including Logan's  
high-chair.

he tells me  
they price it  
immediately  
at thirty dollars.

like always  
he is realizing  
the value  
after giving  
it away.

a history in dog years

mom says Ginger is going  
blind, but i know she is dying  
because she doesn't bark  
at the vacuum anymore;  
never runs to the door,  
nails clicking on cracked  
linoleum.

she is solemn, not like the last dog  
who went out in series of seizures  
while we lay  
side by side  
on the white lace couch  
mom brought from the glenn.

i hardly noticed  
when our first dog died.  
the collie at gram's when  
she & papa kept us all, Jazz who barely came home,  
but whom we loved anyway.

i remember the blue house  
where jessica picked Jazz  
from a batch of puppies.  
but mom insists i was too  
young to remember,  
not even one & just  
figuring out how to crawl.

the season it begins & ends

holding hands  
under beer-  
crusted bar  
tables: hardwood,  
cedar maybe.  
each motion  
countered  
by the little  
known fact  
there has always  
been something  
between us.

wrong time.  
wrong place.  
wrong words.

because we met  
under sweatshirt  
weather: burgundies,  
tree bark browns  
& seventeen pound  
thunderstorms  
weighing down  
our clothes;  
the pounding  
rain drowning  
the pounding  
of my heart  
as you sweep  
calloused fingers  
across my face  
& find my soul  
etched in my earlobe.

the drunker you get,  
the closer i become  
to kissing you  
full on the mouth.

too much.  
too forward.  
too rapid.

& so i back off  
again & we keep  
running in this back  
assward circle.

when we slept in bunk beds

no matter how many times  
it goes through the wash,  
this shirt still smells of you:  
breezes of salt water  
& the musk of time  
breathing deeply  
in your closet.

my thoughts  
driving through  
the mid-west,  
past suffocating  
california winds;  
an endless road trip,  
from which you fail  
to return.

i think back  
on the night  
i spent alone  
in your bed,  
finding pages  
stuffed between  
ceiling tiles.  
i read until the sun  
grasped fingers  
at the top bunk  
& you walked in,  
shoulder jutting  
from the very  
bones of your  
delicate body.

snow fell through  
the window,  
ashes billowing  
from a bonfire.  
we didn't know  
that four years later  
i would collapse  
into your same  
patterns. i would  
love an unlovable  
man, i would be

crushed between  
his fingers he  
would spit  
in my face,  
push me,  
he would break  
my shoulder too.

& i will never know  
what you thought  
about that day  
on the sand  
burning through  
our flip flops.  
i could see  
the intent in  
your eyes,  
the secret pursed  
between your  
cotton candy lips.  
were you wearing  
this very shirt?

## Gridlock

On the worst day  
your hair is short  
again & I hate it.  
You've lost weight.  
You smoke twice  
as much.

The bed of your  
truck is empty  
but for our bodies.  
We are as still,  
damaged  
& rusting.

Silence sucks  
your skinny  
trailer into  
the darkness  
of farmland.  
We are alone,  
but you don't  
kiss me, are unsure  
how to after loving  
someone else.

Years of acrylic  
paint & accidents  
wedge into the night  
between us  
when you tell me  
you are junking  
the truck.

As if she hadn't carried  
you to graduation,  
your grandfather's  
funeral, to my house,  
however hammered.

You slap your palm  
against the window  
I used to peer at  
the moon through  
& say "I think it's

time to move on.”

Did I claim  
to be the world's  
greatest woman?  
Or promise to forever  
say please & thank  
you? When did I  
tell you I  
would  
support  
you no matter what?  
Where's the contract I signed  
promising I would never say no?  
What planet were you on when you  
believed I would blindly accept  
your words, & do women really  
do that there? Where did I  
write that I would never  
belch, or sing in the  
shower, or lose my  
balance in public?  
In what handbook  
did they promise  
your woman  
to be  
submissive  
understanding  
willing  
When did "I love you"  
become a tool of seduction? How many  
years have you spent knowing you never wanted to  
marry? How many days have you lied into eyes? Forged phony  
stories of sticky fingers, an open chest cavity & a love story not of your flesh  
tissue blood breath? When will you come home & say you were worth aching over?

mirage

six months after  
we gave up  
i saw your car  
parallel parked  
outside of  
Morin's Diner,  
the restaurant we  
first held hands in.  
looking through  
the sun-blind glass,  
i pictured us at  
those bar stools;  
half drank honey  
brown at our tips  
& you rocking  
that quarter inch  
long beard you keep  
to hide the spot  
on your chin  
you're ashamed of.

you twist a bottle cap  
in your hands  
& contemplate  
which home  
to go to:  
your apartment  
your mother's  
or to the girl you  
told me you  
were seeing the last  
time we were here.  
& then you stand  
before me,  
eyes shimmering  
ripples of sunlight  
pollution; both hands  
pressed stoically  
to the pane, staring,  
as if all you had to do  
today was knock  
at the glass &

get my attention.

Annie

she holds the puppy eight-year  
old Eleanor saved from suffocation.  
her hair is blond & curly.  
you run your hand through it,  
a bit masochistic as your tips  
reach the end & tug the knots loose.  
the farm behind her looks foreign  
but i miss it anyway & i can't help  
but think your new girlfriend is beautiful.

### Sunspots

Years before I say I've fallen  
in love again, you stand at the top  
of Barbara's stairs: the dusty  
black of your fresh emptied  
room behind you. Down here,  
by the large birch door, the sun  
throws itself all over the house,  
swooning over each piece  
of mahogany.

I empathize with the light,  
aching after you in every room  
while you stand just out of reach.