

Three Poems

KATE NORTHROP

The Roof-Runners

(in the city, at night)

I. *from underneath*

Exactly what they are's unclear, but we wake

already listening. *The fuck*

was that? We develop
some understanding slowly, their footsteps

still drifting through, like algae in a shaft of light

and their laughter carried off beyond us, coherent,
a sentence in a dream. In the morning, sure,

we know we know them. *Those fucking kids—*
so we hurtle

back into the work day: *then I said* and *you know me!*

II. *outside*

In August for four nights, maybe five

In August for four or five nights
going over the row homes on Ogden,

and afterward, startled by something, a premonition,
like entering a room
where the window's been left open

But daylight returns things
into the world, it lines and suspends

—a girl dragging a backpack
back to school, slats
in a greasy blind, a stop-sign— until they hum

brilliantly, like lightbulbs,
the chain swinging in a darkened room, beside a lightbulb.

The Picture Window

(at night)

Rises over the street

Withdraws, or begins to, the blue-black

Held loosely, like a boat
Against which the grasses

Froth up.

You, Willie, never mind.



Inside: the gray stalks of hollyhocks
Knock against the glass (such a *movement* to the boat, a tree
Grown through it)

But you know this world isn't a hallway.

It isn't a hallway
And the boat presses in, coldly imposing.

Tell me.

No, no, no, no, no.



And then:

Rain of slight aspen leaves.

*Some cocksucker, Jesus Christ,
some little motherfucker—*

Yellow Cup

On the kitchen counter, it rings the counter
And the sound wakes...what? Wakes the kitchen,
Tremulous, arranged suddenly, as if on a string.

But sometimes the call goes out and all that returns
In some bumper sticker: *Easy Does It*

Anyhoo, when you return you will see
How the dishes settle under the dishwasher,
Clunking like dull mollusks

How the sky comes down
And greens the windows

So when Charles told me, *I am brokenhearted*

Charlie, I said, wean yourself from love-bunk!
And it's no joke, it's no joke: these days

I must draw myself
From uncertain sights: the neighbor's dog

In the middle of the pond, in the middle of the night.