

## It's not Armageddon

spreading amber fog from north to south  
across the September sky. And no, that's not  
  
a metaphor for depression, or the slow death  
of love. Not even with its signature reference  
  
to the season of falling leaves. It's just smoke  
from a brush fire two hundred miles away,  
  
staining sunlight the color of white sheets  
soaked in a rusty bin. It's just a minor fuckup—  
  
a guy in his yard burning leaves, a spark  
from a gas-powered mower, that Old Crow bottle  
  
smashed in a dry field, finally finding its flame—  
with a consequence writ large enough  
  
for satellites to photograph from space. It's just  
ash dusting the parking lot, like dandruff  
  
brushed from the shoulder of an itchy god.

# Atlantis

Rush hour, leaving the last  
downtown station, our train  
descends under San Francisco Bay

and I imagine we are  
Atlantis sinking, this populous  
of stockbrokers snapping

evening papers, file clerks  
lacing sneakers onto tired,  
stocking feet. We're all

going down together—  
the brown-skinned girl  
wearing fuchsia sweats,

thumbs working the buttons  
of her video game, and the green  
power suit who leans against

a closed door, flips out  
her cell phone, dials home  
to say she's running late,

then mutters *fuck, shit*  
when the train slows  
to a crawl. See the girl

slouched in that corner  
seat, notepad lying open  
on her lap—she's scribbling,

scribbling as if she could  
    keep us alive by recording  
        all our details right: the wingspan

of a boy stretching his yawn,  
    arched eyebrow penciled  
        on a sleeping woman's face—as if,

    fingernail by callus, ripped skirt  
        by sideburn, bottom lip by  
            butterfly tattoo, she could raise us

up from the depths, silver, glimmering.

# Don't Miss It

Turns out the tears  
that Virgin statue  
eked out from the corners

of her eyes were  
insect secretions—  
Mary has been

eaten by bugs  
from the inside. Don't  
worry, pumpkin—

alternative miracles  
arrive on the subway  
platform in twenty-

minute intervals  
every day. No lie—  
in this lifetime

a descendant of  
Confucius takes  
the shape of an LA-

based rapper dropping  
knowledge in English  
and Cantonese. What

I'm saying is, keep  
watch, sweet thing—  
if the good books

pan out in that theory-  
to-practice sort of way,  
you could find Buddha

sitting beside you  
on the L train. In  
fact, you already have.

## Bernal Heights

Knit cap rolled down to eyebrows, corduroys  
slouched below hip bones, the boy leaned into  
Good Life Grocery's door, yelled to the butcher,  
Yo—cops took us fishing. Lookit here—  
his fingers threaded the salmon's gills, an arc of silver  
lifted in the air. Sell it to ya, twenty bucks.  
The butcher shook a grin onto his face, said,  
Way to go, Jackpot, a name that stuck for life.  
And they laughed like water, like last night's  
take of nickels falling in the slot machine's mouth,  
and Jackpot nudged out the doorway, strutting  
up the street, his image flashing in storefront windows,  
that fish swinging from his hand, like a comet  
fallen to earth, a song of luck, of winning.

# “A Soldier’s Home, Hughes, Arkansas, 1970”

after Eugene Richards

The rusted-out laundry wringer  
sinking into the porch’s soft planks

makes the crisp pleats pressed  
into the soldier’s khaki pants

mysterious. His house is loaded  
on cinderblocks—corrugated tin roof,

siding split along the wood grain,  
metal blinds slicing the only

window’s light. The soldier’s brass  
buckle gleams against his cloth belt.

The bill of his private’s cap  
shades a black anonymous bar

across his eyes. For the camera  
he sets his jaw square, his arms

are sword blades pressed to his sides.  
History melts in the baked dust

behind him—snapped bike chain,  
crumpled sock, fifty-gallon drum

shot through with .22 holes.  
On the stoop, a checker-shirted kid

hunches like memory, squinting  
into Arkansas sun. Out front,

the soldier's creased shoulders  
wait to grow chevrons, inverted Vs

flying upward, out of this place.