

## DRIVING THEORY

What I thought was the squeaking of the season's first bats  
was just a rust-gut van idling outside the store.  
What I thought was the future was just more of the same.  
Constantly I feel stationary and in a state of undress  
like a fountain statue, keeping watch over nothing  
but a hoard of coins I can't touch. What was it I wanted,  
dirty water full of presidents flattened in profile?  
If I am free to leave, then why this net of contrails  
and powerplant exhaust? Why this list of beached whales,  
and our need to name a thing even as it disappears?  
Inside each whale is shopping carts, bales of fishing line,  
an entire McDonald's play place worth of plastic.  
Inside my wallet is a license that says I have learned  
how to move through the world without letting it touch me.

## PHOENIX THEORY

Mostly I do not feel small  
and when I do I am

watching the news.  
I am watching the storms come in,

or waiting for the ballots  
to be counted, or waiting

for the bodies to be counted.  
Neither of my senators

have emptied their voice  
mailboxes in months,

so I send them faxes, and in doing so  
imagine a fax machine

kicking to life, chirring  
suddenly in some office,

hulking in its ancientness  
like an insect exoskeleton

with one song left inside of it.  
It reminds me of Dial-Up,

the sound of which, though grating,  
I never found obnoxious

because it meant the world  
was letting me in, heavy invisible gates

hinging open right in my home.  
Nowadays I dread the internet

because it is full of news,  
other people's tragedies—

the internet a kicked dandelion,  
each story a seed falling

back to earth. Mostly I don't  
feel small and when I do

I am reading about the NRA  
or the latest pipeline disaster, or wondering

what my partner's mother,  
who has Parkinson's, will do

if the ACA is repealed. In Ft. Walton  
their house burned down

because a single mouse  
chewed through a wire in the wall.

They stood on the lawn,  
watching flames metastasize

through the structure of their lives.  
The problem with the idea

of a phoenix is the bird  
eventually has to come back

out of the ashes.

## IN REMEMBRANCE

Oh, to make a joyful noise—  
but I was trying to recall  
the first thing I ever forgot,

which wasn't God's voice,  
though I did eventually lose that.  
And it wasn't a teddy bear

with a wind-up music box  
sewn into its chest.  
If you want proof

of love's ragged effects  
on the body, I can show you  
how little of that bear's fake fur

remains after all my hugging.  
And the music box just clicks anymore,  
like a stovetop igniter

in a church kitchen on a weekday.  
On weekdays, a bar in the last town  
I lived offered complimentary shots

of whatever liquor they were trying  
to get rid of, and they served them  
in the same diminutive plastic glasses

with which I consumed  
a thousand communions. That liquor  
was almost never worth drinking,

but I was taught to try  
everything, at least once.  
Which is impossible, of course, and necessary,

if we want to leave  
our old forms behind—  
metamorphosed, like the frogs

who lived in the slough behind my old apartment.  
They sang so loud during storms  
you couldn't hear the rain.

You could almost believe  
it was their voices falling over you,  
filling your clothes, your hair.

Someone better make sure  
the stove is off. Someone better check  
the pantry and make sure

if God shows up on Sunday  
we'll have enough glasses  
to hold him.