

# LIKE STARS, LIKE SMALL-TOWN CHURCHES

When we drove up to Denver  
to attend the inspection of a house  
  
that would, ultimately, not work for us,  
red-tailed hawks were everywhere—  
  
staking out the light posts,  
scouring the bit of prairie  
  
between the In-N-Out Burger  
and the community college.  
  
They were probably after mice or rats  
or whatever could be carried off  
  
to feed their fresh-hatched chicks.  
Or was it too far  
  
into fall for any new hawks  
to adorn those high nests,  
  
the likes of which sometimes miraculously  
hang on long after

the fledglings have left?  
The house was a nest of problems.

Garage too small  
to accommodate a car and still

allow a person entry,  
no radon mitigation, no overflow

valves in the bathrooms,  
hallways too narrow for Karen's wheelchair.

And so as we went through  
the litany of issues, we were falling

out of love with it in real time,  
the life we'd imagined living there

just blowing away, like how the dust  
rose in wind from the in-progress interstate

we took there and back.  
Most times I've made plans, reality

has carried them off,  
though I am cursed

to be a planner, one who,  
even if he knows the world

is a swirling current of indefinite seasons,  
needs to impart some semblance

of control. Interstate, we do go on,  
pitted by salt and overcommitted

to every direction under the sun.  
The hawks were on the light posts

like traffic cameras, or like stars  
above the cheap nativity scenes

of small-town churches  
we passed on our way home.

# IN THE MUSEUM OF RIP CURRENTS

In one frame a woman is inventing papyrus.  
In another frame, rust has overtaken a field

of bluebird school buses. Take love,  
for example, how like the tide it leaves

and returns, wearing down whatever it touches  
until houses fall into the sea. In one frame

a three-headed cow is born,  
what some people take to be a sign

of the apocalypse. In another frame the ocean  
rears up like an impossible stallion.

In one frame a trickle of radiation  
is pulled out to sea like a child

into a rip current. What we were urged to do  
we ignored. I dedicate this wing to our new moon

which will not last, and which may  
be a rocket booster from the sixties

falling back to Earth. The challenge,  
when riding those ancient buses, was to pry open  
the stuck window so a breeze could enter you.

# WILDERNESS AND THE AMERICAN MIND

I was thinking of a heavy hammer compelling  
something molten and malleable into shape.  
All this time, I've never gotten a clear answer  
on Yellowstone, whether half of the country  
is in danger of being buried under volcanic ash,  
turned into another macabre garden  
of statues like Pompeii. Play me something  
on the jukebox, a little less reminiscent  
of fire. Today our trees were wild  
with blackbirds, thirty at least, all swarming  
the feeders and picking dropped seed  
off the ground. I figured they were just  
migrating through until I remembered  
how much of Colorado was burning,  
and I realized the birds were probably fleeing  
some forest crumbling into smoke. A neighborhood  
cat came through the yard and sent the whole flock  
tumbling up and away, a banished system  
of shadows. I was thinking of a city  
underground, one future posited by those  
who think we'll ruin even the atmosphere,  
make this planet scarred and unforgiving  
as Mars. In Kentucky we climbed down

into Mammoth Cave, hundreds of feet  
into the earth. The guide clicked off the light  
so momentarily we were nowhere and bodiless,  
how anyone would have felt lost in those sinkholes  
hundreds of years ago. On our way back  
to the world of light we found a bat  
huddled sleeping against the wall of the staircase,  
a solitary dark and folded heart.