I pass the woman whose husband died last fall—I know her, like all of our neighbors, by her dog: Booker’s mom, Booker’s dad’s widow—and wave. She barely nods, a tectonic plate gliding imperceptibly.

Now when the neighbors mill around after work on this city block of grass, she is separate, loss enveloping her like bubble-wrap around a long-necked vase. She is—am I cold to think this?—stately in her grief. I step aside, stumbling on an oak root, as my dog barrels toward a squirrel, or the thought of a squirrel. Once in college I froze in a restaurant hallway, between the restrooms and the kitchen clatter, crying suddenly—over what? Just one of those minor symphonies of despair that roiled unexpectedly in those years. What did I know of sorrow then?—as servers and diners moved hastily around me, my body a rock parting a nervous river current.
Tonight I leave the kitchen light on,  
two 60-watt bulbs blazing,  
so she can see her water bowl—

small apology for when I crossed  
the park today to wait in shade  
as she nosed through clover

and from that cooler distance  
watched her nudge one bare calf,  
then another, sniff a hand, a knee.

Even after I realized she was  
looking for me among strangers,  
I let her search,  

need to be looked for;  
whatever kind of person  
that makes me to be found.
The Day After We Killed the Dog

The day after we killed the dog—when grief told us we killed her, surely we killed her with her muzzle nestled between my breasts, while we lied,

whispering *we love you* into her ears, surely a lie as the vet inserted the needle into her haunch—I woke already crying or still crying to the sound of her rubber ball squeaking in the hallway.

Then I stirred from a nap I’d fallen into crying, woke to the word *love*,

my husband saying to the empty wall *we love you*, saying to the empty nail *we love you*, above a painting that had fallen.

The next week, behind the leather club chair,
a puddle—of what? from where? —and then a penny hitting bathroom tile, the plink distinctive, the provenance a mystery.

If grief leads us to a new belief, to midnight walks on which we pet the empty air between us and feel fur, conjuring the contour of alert ears, if this is where grief leads, we’ll follow,

as if we had a choice, as if we weren’t forced by the jet blast of grief’s engine, its unbearable heat distorting the air we see through. But through the vapor of that heat, the shimmer of a kinder lie.
Persona Non Grata

Shun the body, that betrayer.

Do not speak to the body.
Do not dine with the body.
Do not dance with the body.

Do not accept the body’s invitations to concerts
at the American Legion or a weekend at its charmingly
remodeled beach house on St. George.
Don’t even look at the body when you pass
it in the hall. The body wants back in, readmittance
to the inner circle, the cadre, the pack,
the huddle. But the body should have thought

of that before. The body is glossing over
its wrongs with that gilded tongue you used to admire.
The body bets you’ll plead down its crimes, that you can’t
stay mad forever—one look at its sad eyes,
yadda yadda. But the body’s got nothing

you want anymore, not the stretched organ
of skin, the cleverly hinged elbows, the internal
broken widgets. You’ve been training your whole life
to hold this grudge. Keep giving the body
its own cold shoulder.