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*Safe Passage*

*There are things  
We live among 'and to see them  
Is to know ourselves'.*

—George Oppen, *Of Being Numerous*

News passes through

shoeless hours    sleepless loss

fallen off a white cap    man    woman    shore-washed child

like water-striders riding a black storm against a black wave

what is being carried

will disappear

conclusions will be drawn

breath will be caught

at the border

sorrow passes through

sorrow passes through

at the border

Someone will whisper    you need

to know there are words you need to know

what will you do

god's in your shoe like a stone



David Mondedeu, photogravure

*Sleeping Birds*

And what to make of the moth that drinks the tears of sleeping birds.  
Don't be fooled, the tenderness of that image is a ruse:  
to mine the mineraly tears, *Hemiceras Hieroglyphica*  
sends a long barbed proboscis into the eye  
of the magpie robin sleeping in its jackfruit tree.  
The moth does this without permission,  
without sympathy. The effect on the robin is unknown —

## *Ghosts*

*Life, this charade of not-death.*

—Brenda Shaughnessy, “Last Sleep Best Sleep”

1.

You see them or feel that you see. They are curious, like back door neighbors who peek through your windows when lights come on late. You think it’s a dream, the first time you see them.

2.

You’re not saying one way or another. Like the time you saw your dead father’s arm reach out of a maroon Grand Marquis in front of you and drop a fat letter into the drive-up mailbox. You followed the car to the Safeway down the street. You looked back too far.

3.

A chorus line of starlings fly off the wire, perform a minor murmuration, turn and cover your entire car with starling shit and flapping wings. It takes three times through the car wash. It feels personal.

4.

It is personal. A cold wildness on a cloudy dark day, geese are ribboning and a lid lifts open to orange sky in late afternoon, catches your breath and you think that dying isn’t such grim business after all.

5.

A memory of bones: in a bed of white wildflowers, the white skeleton of a mare, her leg bones in a tangle of barbed wire, a smaller skull tucked under her remaining ribs. You take the colt’s skull home, and ghosts poke bony fingers into your shoulders until you bury it.

6.

Dream: a bridge of bones in bright sun. Motioning you over, mother on the other side. Take my hand. You struggle to get away.

7.

When mother is disturbed, she averts her eyes, turns to birds at the feeder. Her partial list one morning: a pine siskin, a white-breasted titmouse, and a mourning dove feeding on the ground. The rustle of dry pin oak leaves

in the wind, and her involuntary hum. You hear yourself saying words passed down to you.

8.

*Parents' sour grapes can set their children's teeth on edge.*

9.

You carry a small cemetery inside you: your people, and people who used to be your people: dead people, dogs and hawks and owls crowd in. Sometimes at night, you think you're at a dinner party where everyone sits cheek to jowl and drinks too much.

10.

Cookie fortune taped to a cupboard door: *Don't forget, you are always on our minds.*

11.

They send you a photo of him after he's closed his eyes. Share our sorrow, it says. You rub the screen to change the focal point. You double back: so what if together you lived in a castle, and bittersweet hung heavy on wires out back. Golden light. Watercress lush along the creek. Now you can say you know about love, and there is no one left to dispute it.

12.

Here, it's dry, spare. The wind has started its spring blow along the foothills. Birds huddle in thickets and dragonflies hover as if they have something to report. Dust blows into all of it.

13.

The ghosts shake their heads and purse their lips. You've grown old, they mouth. Sometimes they climb onto your bed and sometimes they pet you as if you don't know where your home is. Sometimes, you are soothed. Sometimes, you are invisible.

14.

A column of night smoke, the soundless flap of an owl's wings, something soft brushing up against your calf. On the continuum between *seen* and *unseen*, closer to *seen* seems about right, like a relief of wet light laid across a dark field.