It’s like a dance scene, a ball, 
in a Jane Austen story with lines 
of dancers bowing and changing 

hands. What is it about dances — 
everything that’s supposed to happen 
happens. The ones who’ve been wary 

are smiling at each other and offering 
their arms. The red blood cells 
look trim and fine in their regular 

shapes, the oxygen keeps coming in 
in pairs, clean and light in their airy 
Regency dresses, and they meet, 

they bow, they keep matching up, 
stepping delicately around each other, 
spinning around the alveolus 

that’s lit by a chandelier, and what 
amazes you every breath is how 
every single dancer knows the steps 

and it occurs to you that this dance 
has been going on since fish stepped 
on shore, or even earlier, because 

fish, don’t they, and other creatures, 
use oxygen, and you make a note 
to look up the time period of Darwin’s
theories though you’re pretty sure
that Austen predates Darwin—just think
what Austen would have done

with Darwin’s ideas! —and wouldn’t
that be a dance to see those two
geniuses meet and bow to each other

as the dance goes on and now you
don’t see the individuals so much
as the lovely rhythm, the pulse

of comings and goings and
the chandelier glows and there
are hundreds of millions of alveoli

just like this one all over the palace
but then the light seems to pale
and falter

and what’s supposed
to be happening, isn’t, and wait, there
it is again, the music, and a few steps
but the light is dim and the partners

uncertain, scuttling, some red blood cells
make off with oxygen but

others are left

empty-handed and the alveoli fill

with blue, there’s more blue coming in

and the dance hall is closing, the lights
flashing on and off and you can’t move,

you are locked inside that alveolus
and at the same time you are stepping
around outside with your hand on

the boulder that is your chest, bowing,
unsure, trying to restart,
trying to draw in

what’s been flowing since you were a fish,

since you were pulled into air, wailing.
Geopolitics, Stateside

I have been too lenient, letting the dogs climb onto the couch, where they love to straddle and shout at squirrels, at animals walking by. Hey, I say, knock it off. How about a little live and let live around here? Real Americans, these two, lovers of comfort, lovers of love. Ferocious players.

I wonder at their teeth, their power. Surely they smell my blood beneath this thin sheath of skin. Amazing that they let me live.

But this easy living has gone too far. Everywhere the odor of dog. The couch is stained by clots of dirt from claws or possibly rectum, grime from their oily coats. It must be cleaned. I find the cushions I lean against have no structure: inside the cover just loose green fuzz. Somewhere someone makes a living making this stuff. Is it a child? So much I don’t know. I vacuum up grit and acorn shards beneath the cushions and note the frame: steel visible under a thin scrim, coiled and ready to spring. Meanwhile, one dog is giving the other the stink-eye, who erupts in noise. Somehow I must manage this. How much will have to be done again, over and over? Consider the washing machine, which does what it does, like a man focused on one idea only. Things come out clean but threadbare and shaken. One dog sheds like crazy, the other’s so greasy she leaves streaks on the walls.
They had to be trained not to shit in the house, that their house is my house, too. Every once in a while there's a new regime around here, say, after watching Cesar Millan on the TV, but who can focus on status all the time? It’s an alpha concern when there is other work to be done. Anyway, we live as a pack here. When I sink onto the couch the dogs press their bodies against my legs, look into my eyes. We are here, they say. Now. Message of the bodhisattva. Not the moment to introduce new rules. After all, I count on them to keep me safe. They are perpetually who they are. So I work at the stains on the sofa with a washcloth and a little white soap. The cushion covers go into the machine on delicate cycle, with extra low agitation. I am only trying not to destroy what I have. It is not that it is any less soiled.
bombs fall on Ukraine, shattering everything carefully made, frightening the animals, turning parents into cloaks over children. The old flee on the backs of younger men, picking their way across broken bridges. Once they sat in quiet houses. They gazed out polished windows at trees and birds, watched for spring. Outside my window the white pine grows a foot every year. It was taken from the woods by a friend, who saw it hemmed in and struggling. Now it grows fat and round. Once I found a baby robin deep in its branches, stashed there by a watchful parent while she foraged. We shelter each other. Where we are planted is pure chance.

For all we know, the trees of Ukraine, who have no shelter, who appear in photos halved, beheaded, scorched and jagged, are crying out, their voices carried by westerly winds all the way round the world. For all I know, the trees I live under feel tremors through their toes in the earth, shudder for distant sisters.

For all I know, their rising sap catches in their riverine throats.
Stolen Code

for the mRNA vaccine

By now the instructions have been destroyed,
dissolved and dumped with the trash,
as in any spy story,

the ribonucleic messengers expelled
in the nano-balls of lipids they slid
around in. And good

riddance. They were greasy company,
but useful. By now the cells
have all assembled

their spikes, like the cruel gutter
spikes that discourage pigeons,
who by another name

are the doves of peace. Easy for me
to talk of peace, when my role
is merely ceremonial,

parasitical, swanning around above
the neck while the city-state of the body
prepares for siege.

We are creatures of war, meant to survive,
committed right down to the cell.
I am allowed

to think what I like, to siphon energy,
to pretend I know what’s going on,
to write odes.