

***“Lincoln, Nebraska,” 1940***

*After John Vachon’s photograph*

There are secrets under the theater’s  
crumbling corner-stone, secrets broken  
in two, then three. There are secrets  
where the water pools at night,  
where the datura will seed, but won’t  
let loose its grip, only wilt in the wind.  
Secrets are harvested like pigeon feathers.  
Secrets are hidden between faux beads,  
formed between the fingers. Secrets so  
smooth-skinned—soaked overnight  
for as long as black beans—  
they’re softhearted. Little is laid bare:  
tracks from the cellar swept over, snags  
knitted back in, change spent as tips,  
loose hair pinned away from the eyes.  
So little is laid bare, so little the mind  
believes the heart. Before mass starts,  
the overnight guests will go away.  
You’ll remember to turn off the lights  
in the morning, lock the doors. Remember  
to pat the dark smudge from your lips.

*“Untitled,” 1949*

*After Toni Frissell’s photograph*

Such is the texture of light, water riffling under weight,  
the shape of the boat, the woman’s foot,  
the bend of the oar and crouch of the oarsman.

Such is the way we speak to each other, softly  
at first and then repeated, louder,  
such is the way the shadow like a whale hovers

beneath us, only inches below on the ocean floor.  
This is the way every movement  
feels in direct sunlight, impossible, unnecessary.

Feeling—whether tenderness or distance—  
rises to the surface of the skin.  
Once I had a string of pearls so misshapen I hadn’t

doubted they had been dug from the lips of oysters.  
Such is the way, the only way,  
one rocks oneself into believing. Somewhere

someone doesn’t speak a name, my name,  
somewhere she turns her back to me,  
and I am back beside her, completely still.

## *Candy Lily*

There could have been a hint  
of red-yellow spotting  
there in the waxy petals but

maybe it was the look  
of memory, my memory, lit  
like a brittle candle.

It seemed as if, as if I had seen this  
lily before. But there, on the flower,  
no pattern—and maybe that

was what made it feel rare. Six petals,  
solid-yellow, one longer than  
the others but barely

(not so different from a guiding star)  
and all no more than tacked  
to the stem. It lasted, in the glass cruet

we placed it in, for no more  
than an hour and closed,  
or more like *yielded*. Pausing

over lunch, you, dressed for work,  
freshly ironed, shiny new shoes,

soon to be someone's teacher,

wondered if it had ever opened,  
if this was a new bud altogether,  
and with that, I, hopeless, forgot—

until just now—about what,  
like sudden raucous laughter,  
had been disturbed in me.

Beautiful thing.