

TWO POEMS FROM *THE DITCH WAS LIT LIKE THIS*

FEND

A prairie bus cannot forget.
The plane. A car.

 Why
these moments, in the dark,
half-asleep against cool glass
my heart cannot get larger.

 And
whatever has happened, in these
cramped seats, to shorten my words,

the humility with which I approach
long words, complex breath, is false,
of course; marred by both fear
and contempt, as the mother's chattering
across the aisle, to a boy who would sleep,
if only he could, if only she would
let him be, to word his first journey
himself, in dreams, is also informed
by fear she pretends is only for the child,
by contempt she wants to believe is only born
of a world that could do what has been done
to the boy, and not to her own spinning heart,
which cancels out absence over and over again,
by throwing out words that grow larger and larger;
the only thing blunt, the boy, his small face
untouched by words, clean and exhausted.

And beside these two characters I have
just made up, me, riding to you, and asleep,
and in my dreams I am not afraid of large words,
and you know my heart, not a flash, an elaborate flourish,
becoming. My heart on a bus and at dawn
a dog barks outside in the dark.

WITH MY OWN SHOVEL

I am making this tragedy every day.
It's not so bad. I name the assholes Keith
Something, after a big kid I never knew,

but who punched and kicked me daily.
It's such a thrill to watch him end up marrying
his sister, mixing things up, distorting

absolute truths, and so on, but people still love
him. In the end I always forget the bully or know
bullies do not burst onto the scene fully formed;

they're stick figures in another play, out of sight
somewhere. There is a guy I put in the background
with my father's name-he loves blood, he loves money -

trying not to show it. He kicks the shit out of this puppet
I made him. We hide it even from the audience.
In his perfunctory heart he wants to be a cowboy

-but the way he holds his face in his hands, and how
he can't even raise his head to kill food-he is unable
to sing for rain. My mother, of course, will have nothing

to do with it. After work I am back in the unpopulated
world of dirt and air, and surprised; there is little reaction
to me here, if any. I do the dishes, walk the dog.

I have the nagging sense that something is forgotten:
a key stuck in the lock like a knife through meat,
touching wood and ringing in the air; or love

that opened itself in every room of the house, until
in spring, when suddenly all exceptions were in play:
A boy held a green weed plucked from the sidewalk

- half of it was in his mouth, and he hated it, but didn't know why.