

JOHN BLAIR

Eclogue 18: The House that's Not the End of the World

Everyone, deep in their hearts, is waiting for the end of the world . . .
—Haruki Murakami, 1Q84

It's not the end of the world it's the house
next door the one with PENULTIMATE
painted on the curb out front instead of numbers

and the man or woman who lives there
does his or her living alone every five-to-nine
and coming or leaving he or she wears

like a peacoat the kind of tired that sews
your eyes shut or sews them open
depending on any given night's

particular chemistry its contrary impulses
regarding the logos of breathing and sleeping
and waking once more how sweet the nitrogen

(the better part of breath) the inkling
of oxygen the bright soupçon of dioxide
and monoxide more out than in thank

God every day looking smaller than it is
like the forced perspective that lets *farceurs*
prop up the tower of Pisa or the blazing

sun or God himself if anyone cared to try
(old man lounged invisible and indifferent
among the dogs and dippers in a spinning

firmament syrupy with imaginary judgments
incense and insects a plague of prayer
sticks on the walls like uncured paint)

and when the phone rings or someone
knocks at the door looking for the end
or at least directions the man or woman

in the house next door to the end of the world
turns out every light one by one so as
to enjoy undisturbed the simple the quiet

pleasure of every disaster happening to someone
else in a cul-de-sac perhaps where the last
house burned down long before it was built

a man or woman watching at a dark
window every five-to-nine to count the passers-
by (they always come at night) reluctant

and looking back though the street is implacably
one-way the end just down there past the house
that's only *almost* no stop sign or flashing sky

no lovely light of day *is that it?* she
or he might hear someone ask and it always is
no streetlights no last goodbye just

an open field of heady beyond where none
of them ever wanted to go where all of them
always wanted to go.

Eclogue 5: Beautiful Words Are Not the Truth

In time the stars become us all
in the way they became Greek gods
and the great shuffling bear
walking his insouciance above
every wilderness

or in the way that a nimety
of apocryphal monkeys typing away
can become prophets or the better gods
of reason because something
always goes on and on

even if it's nothing except
the space between the bars that makes
the tiger's cage a cage
and though beautiful words
are not the truth (so said Lao Tzu)

they are truth enough for now
like the old joke about the man
who owned Lincoln's ax though it
had been given two new heads
and three new handles since then

every truth is replaceable
when something more undoubtable
comes along to show it the door
the limestone hills you live among
becoming the sea-bed they once were

once again because that is their bone-
whitened truth beneath the truth
the stars themselves falling back
into heavy clouds of hydrogen spun
from infinite densities of potential

shapeless but still prowling ursine
among all we'll ever be pattern
and field every word shining
itself eventually into lizards and milky
rivers of wild rice and lesser daemons

who used to be human just like
any one of the many truths
that once were you before
you were born again into the shapes
of all the veritable stars.