

53rd street

thank you for this empty street.
for a parking lot stricken with midnight
and not another voice, not even a politeness,

only the resignation of the trees, harmless and navy
blue and royal. bless this walk, just mine,

and the animal that orchestrates this shadow. thank you
for each blonde saucer of light that dips beneath me

as if i were the president of this timid land.
for this blessed movement, legs that let spread

proudly as an occupation, a seat on the bus.
if it was earlier in the evening, the streets would throb, and a man
might ask me for help. i'd admit i have no money,
save nothing. i say i'm sorry

a dozen times a day, as if i can hardly be bothered with sacrifices
that aren't worn around the neck. i think
about neckties too, ever since i invested in a future and thought. thank you
for this stubble and night, unconfined.

it is hard to not be grateful for being able to walk like this,
alone but unaware of how i cannot be alone, the dark

within me that scares other men just enough——how my arms let me be
single, how the register of my voice is a foregone conclusion like the dusk
reminding a white of its black. how a sign that says *beware of dog*
is enough to make a man move on, the very next house. chicago is still for me.

i get to be a boy on this street. it's as good as being young,
when grown folks are mountains that block other mountains, or men

that wrestle with their god, and i am unaware of my advancing
the impasse under which an omen sleeps.

only once, i beat blood from my brother's nose as if he was whole
wheat dough. he became a rose that overtook me. lord, i am

a ministry, i am a billboard that slips into the sky, and a mythical
bird. i am a battalion of hearts and this street is a parade,
that, i know, is just a street, but listen,

isn't a metaphor a promise—
a swear that what seems at first to be
is not? my adam's apple is an inauguration.

i'm thankful to not be afraid,
though i slip closer to it every year; i worry that i am old
enough to trade making light
of my own permanence for the permanence of my own light.

that what has already past is past. that what i say is more important to hear
than to keep. i can't remember how i used to pray. directly, i think,

instead of this. on this street
i can be both a memory of smallness
and a behemoth, worry past nothing, every alcove—only the bodies

and the blankets and my hotness
through butter. even the boyish violences that made me
afraid are good to me. the streets
where i cut myself on dares, saw dogs raised
in the air like sails, all of us traveling by our necks, swaddled

tenors beneath us. we peered into the open composition
of a bird that had been taken from a blue movement to a sidewalk
that was not wet enough to reach us but too wet for us to touch