

## KABLOOEY IS THE SOUND YOU'LL HEAR

then plaster falling and the billow of gypsum  
after your sister blows a hole in the ceiling  
of your brother's bedroom with the shotgun  
he left loaded and resting on his dresser.

It's Saturday, and the men are in the fields.  
You and your sister are cleaning house  
with your mother. Maybe your sister hates  
cleaning that much, or maybe she's just

that thorough, but somehow she has lifted  
the gun to dust it or dust under it (you are busy  
mopping the stairs) and from the top landing  
where you stand, you turn toward the sound

to see your sister cradling the smoking shotgun  
in her surprised arms, like a beauty queen  
clutching a bouquet of long-stemmed roses  
after being pronounced the official winner.

Then the smell of burnt gunpowder  
reaches you, dirty orange and sulfurous,  
like spent fireworks, and through the veil  
of smoke you see a hole smoldering

above her head, a halo of perforations  
in the ceiling—the drywall blown clean  
through insulation to naked joists, that dark  
constellation where the buckshot spread.

The look on your sister's face is pure  
shitfaced shock. You'd like to stop and  
photograph it for blackmail or future  
family stories but now you must focus

on the face of your mother, frozen at the base  
of the stairs where she has rushed from  
vacuuming or waxing, her frantic eyes  
searching your face for some clue

about the extent of the catastrophe  
that's just visited. But it's like that heavy  
quicksand dream where you can't move  
or speak, so your mother scrambles up the steps

on all fours, rushes past you, to the room  
where your sister has just now found her voice,  
already screaming her story—*it just went off!*  
*it just went off!*—as if a shotgun left to rest

on safety would rise and fire itself.  
All this will be hashed and re-hashed around  
the supper table, but what stays with you  
all these years later, what you cannot forget,

is that moment when your mother  
waited at the bottom of the steps  
for a word from you, one word,  
and all you could offer her was silence.

## NEVER MIND

Lately, I've been forgetting the words for things.  
*Tortilla*, for example, in the Mexican restaurant.  
I am helpless. *A type of flatbread, made from wheat*

*or corn*, I offer description in the absence  
of the right word or shout, *What is the casing*  
*in which a burrito is wrapped*, as if this were *Jeopardy!*

Lately, too, I've been calling myself, surprised  
to see my own name light up the phone display  
when the landline part of me dials the cell,

lost in the tangle of sheets or left behind  
the stack of books still mulling over something  
I read by Pessoa. Never mind. My brain

cleans out its closets each night, discards words  
and phrases like garments that are old-fashioned,  
ill-fitting, or haven't been off their hangers in years.

"Can you help me out," my student says.  
"What's the name of that tragic jazz singer?"  
(She thinks I'll know this because I'm old.)

Voice like Chinese porcelain, gardenia behind  
the ear. We puzzle over it for minutes  
before I google, "lady sings the blues."

And then there's the strange case of my friend  
the botanist, who can reel off the Latin name  
of any plant—castor bean (*ricinus communis*),

black cohosh (*cimicifuga racemosa*), mugwort  
(*artemisia vulgaris*)—but who could not remember  
the title of a film or the actors who starred in it

if you tied her down and beat the bottoms  
of her feet. “*Lover Boy*,” is how she refers  
to every movie star. “You know, the one

who was married to that *Cutie-Pie*.” Surely,  
this is medical. I must request the Latin name  
for the remedy, or stop by the apothecary,

or just break down and visit my physician—  
good old *what's-her-name*—and confess all.  
Never mind. The phone is sure to ring someday

from the endless bottom of my purse.  
The message, when I retrieve it, will be long  
and full of unrecognizable jargon, the voice  
of the nurse, no doubt, with all the gory details.