

AMY SCHUTZER

When I Sleep, It Still

comes to me,
not a dream, with that raveling,
reel to reel, spooling behind the eyes,
circus and slow motion.
No. It is more like shadow,
instant before waking,
eyes opening, sleep a gravity that pulls on me,
the window bare of curtain or shade
and the stagnant, ambiguous light
of morning, a frost that etches across the glass.

It comes to me:
woman with a finger to her lips,
in a doorway to a backyard
of rusting grass, grass with a sour blight,
finger bloodtipped and raised in the gesture of quiet,
mouth a carnelian flame that turns in on itself,
and a girl in a plaid dress
four feet away,
arms fixed to her sides,
pale, milky arms
like the breast feathers
of the dying hens running by
the girl barefoot in the reddening grass
refusing, refusing
all that the woman asks.