

JEHANNE DUBROW

from *Dark Lines Against the Dark*

I mute the mouths. I stare
until the screen has turned to snow.

Good night, I say, walls flickering reflected light.
How real the faces I have seen.

Someone else will have to rise,
the cushions like a cave in their collapsing.

Good night, I say, gripping the remote.
I press a button with the word OK.

■

Numbness is another way
of turning off the news.

Think how busy cafes were in war,
patrons lifting sweetened cups

of bitter to their lips, the brothels full
of sounds resembling ecstasy.

No, the singer said, there's nothing I regret.
Tonight, I'm putting stoppers in my ears—

I call it falling because I drop
like ice into a glass of sleep.

■

I mail my photograph
and payment for the tiny book

I will carry in case of crisis.
When it comes, its pages are blue emptiness,

unstamped with exile I can imagine.
Hasn't my family run from countries known as home?

Isn't that our custom?
I place my hand on the cover—

the golden bird embossed there, looking back
at a sky that's almost black.



For a few days: frost
remakes the lawn as frozen spines.

I'm stepping on small bones.
In these outlying parts

streets are named Whispering or Leaf.
I'm leashed to a small companion

who leads me from one message to another,
squats in the grass, rubs

against a hydrant's iron neck.
I'm bundled in feathers,

the downy air, to prove
what breed of animal I am.



I'm watching people play
with little windows in their palms.

To change the scene they touch the glass.
Words bubble up in blue and gray.

Later we might say our ears
were wired with enormous sounds.

We swiped faces as if rubbing
smudges from a mirror.

We became what we liked, a thousand
thumbs held armless in the air.



Let me pretend already
the poem must be hidden

in a paper cup. To read
what's written is to drink.

Now all stories are served
with a stir of something sweet.

I'm spilling words from a tiny
packet torn open at the top.



The day in review is a scroll
of shapes across the screen—

I read not for meaning
but to track the vanishing.

The words say that he said,
I NEVER SAID. In this way,

meaning is the last pink light
that glows above a fence.

I watch it disappear. Again,
he says, I NEVER SAID.

In the yard, there are only dark
lines against the dark.



A voice is saying very fine.
Fine people, it's saying

into the mic. The people are fine,
it says, both sides of them.

Sides both are people fine.
Both fine on side people. Fine,

it says, fine fine. Some very
fine people on both sides.



Once in a foreign city, I fell
into a fever and dreamed of trains

going farther to the east.
A man collects samples of concrete

to say a word for chamber is emptiness.
To say it never happened.

What Prussian Blue on the walls, he says.
Like this, he disappears the dead.

An alternative to fact is vertigo,
the floor rising up to strike my face.



The pigeon in the box
learns to press a button

with its beak, from the dark
a pellet of food released.

This is pleasure and reward.
I push a key. The screen

asleep in front of me returns
to light. I am modified,

conditioned to respond.
My room is glass on every side.

Filtered, the sky is a picture
I would like to post.



When I removed myself
from the thing that's called a feed,

as if conversation were a kind
of eating, I felt like famine.

For a time, I missed the sharing
as it's known, the communal

passing around of news, small bites
I used to take of other lives.



The opposite of truth
is a river in the underworld—

the dead drink to forget.
When the viper bites

our heel, we don't feel it.
Maybe we have fallen in,

fog of floating in gray waters,
soot flowers on our eyes.



If I type dot dot dot,
I mean words are curtains

fluttering in vacant rooms.
I mean the temple is crumbling.

I mean someone is listening
even to the air between.

I send an image of the sea. I send
an icon of someone running.

Better not to speak.
By the sign of a tilted face,

I say half of me is laughing
at the moon, its silver lunacy.



In a foreign city, I touched the holes
where nails had been,

a groove in the wood like a body
dug up from the ground.

Here, I make my house
anonymous and, therefore, nothing

fixed beside the door.
Nothing of the long unrolling

of history, the silver case
that held a parchment scroll.

Nothing. No absences but those
that have been drilled inside of me.



After I walk through
the doorway without walls,

my body patted by blue gloves,
I sit among strangers, watching

the talk we make into our hands.
I remember threats

were given colors, red severe,
orange when the risk was high.

Now there is no chart.
We tie the laces of our shoes

and cram our burdens
into the little space above.



When I say believe me,
I mean the tongue goes numb—

it could be singing or lying
on the floor of the throat.

Did I mention the body
is a great hotel and it's filled

with golden things?
The eyes are flatscreens.

The ears never stop playing
one broken sound.

Believe me. Believe me.
The mouth is a door

that locks from outside,
its glittering key melted down.