

ANN STAPLETON

Hail Maggie, Full of Grace

Hauled out of your old life —
like a toddler from a well, black
blanket of stone around the runaway,
safe, alone there, waiting with until —

into a terror of new faces all around,
you, trembling, blinking, in the truck,
in sunlight that has clubbed you
blind, afraid to try this latest luck.

Your eyes say that we are not right —
the past is never just the past.
Our new ways are too clear and bright,
but gradually, your eyes adjust.

It's months before you start to trust
the mean drunk daylight one more time. It comes
at you — northsoutheastwest — the sun
a flashlight in love's hand.

A sharp bark for my going
out, another for my coming in — your
clearest warning against hate: never
turn your back on him.

Though you still visit that dark place, you
come home gentle every time. And now
you look into my face, and with
your fear you comfort mine.

O, Maggie, though this world subtracts,
you're still retriever. And if a body
traveled roadward with the trash, starved
you would tear those bags apart — to save her.

You know the path into the pines — and
follow where I can't keep up — where hawks
cry out our given names, but you
will never let me stop.

And running in the grass tonight, you're
not remembering: your odd gait, like
a butterfly's, discovering — all crooked —
a way to love this day straight.

O help me now to want this bread, to
want my awkward, three-leg life, to want
the freedom of this world, to leave
the doghouse on its side.

Beneath the dwindled hair, the shrunken
fat, the arc of ribs, the collar
burn — under the hookworm, in the broken
heart, is something that I want to learn:

the dance of mercy on this hour, dance
of now and never mind, your oddling
beat. It is the missing one, the taken
thing, that has to bear this weight.