

David McAleavey

### **At the day care center**

Cleaning the gerbil cage, Miebeth  
found one dead. He'd been happy  
for years, the way gerbils can be happy.

Three or four kids  
gaped at Miebeth with her coffee can  
trying to pick up the little corpse

while keeping the live one from crawling in,  
which it kept doing,  
making her seem clumsy.

The kids were asking what  
happened, what's going on,  
what's wrong.

It's hard to say, "Nothing's wrong,"  
but Miebeth is right, that's  
what to tell the young.

## Buried lives

1.

This side of the window,  
four succulents on a shelf, a spider plant,

alternating lines of light and shadow  
from the mini-blinds. Beyond, three elm-like  
zelkovas in the median, light traffic.

On the hill still mostly white with snow,  
birds fly in and out of an enormous forsythia  
like thoughts, sparrow, mockingbird.

Wispy twists of cloud, lined and linked by the blinds,  
gradually merge to “overcast”;  
the sun “goes away”;

mockingbird and sparrow still  
in the bush.

2.

Not the first time I’ve dreamt about a suicide.

The second time I’ve had this one,  
where a middle-aged guy with a potbelly  
standing on the roof of his truck  
ties a rope around his neck –  
the other end’s tied to his house –  
then jumps into a hole which goes through the cab  
into the earth into a cavern –

he’s gone as I watch,  
me, and not me.

3.

What’s under wraps  
warps. Go carefully around the body.

She'd said he viewed her as meat,  
as just an organ to jack off into.

She was thinking of *Portnoy's Complaint*  
where the guy uses a package of liver.

4.

As for the meaning of our lives –

the direction of the river –

how the tenderness of love, so real, so persuasive,  
convinces us we have a purpose –

how about the linguist philosopher lecturing in New York  
claiming many languages

double negatives

to intensify negation,

and a few, like English,

to form a positive –

though none, so far as he knew, uses

two positives

to make a negative –

to which a guy in the back mutters, “Yeah, yeah.”

## Remote Vermont lake

Many leaves down and many just falling  
where we walked in mid-October, a cove  
where water reflected reds and oranges  
as if meant to do that, then;

at its edge a shack boarded up,  
caving in, a length of stovepipe  
rusting on the roof.  
We spoke, as if speech, we spoke

as if we would always live  
where high mountain waters  
reached their brimming limit, pushed  
ripple after ripple by the gentle wind.

## The linoleum prince

Rising above trees  
then steadily higher  
the wind loud as drums.

If you need to unravel things, said the novelist,  
things stop.

My immaturity is voluptuous,  
cried the chorus of daughters,  
it is hard to wait  
on the wind.

*In the fairy tale,  
a linoleum prince is looking for a bride;  
no one will let him in at the homeproducts fair  
so he has to wait at the door like a rolled-up  
magazine the mailman  
couldn't wedge through the slot.*

*Finally a posse of impoverished immigrants  
comes up and can't get in either  
lacking enough credit,  
and to salvage their machismo  
they haul the roll off.*

*He wanted this though he couldn't have known it.  
Animals stroke him all over,  
every morning a woman washes him,  
and the shoes, the slippers!  
No part of him feels unappreciated, none of him  
trash, even the scraps  
from cutting to fit him to the room  
patch worn floors in other rooms, other houses.  
The princess he had wanted, pseudomarlble countertop and  
brass trim, window greenhouse and downdraft range,*

*she was abstract anyway,  
out of reach,  
and now he is happy,  
being used is enough, being fully employed,  
thank you, thank you!*

The pulse-press of puzzled desire  
imagines objects, deliberates, will not attain them,  
finds itself being used in an *exemplum*,  
and then again  
reverts to a rising swell –

*Down there, the others,  
that drum, my own heart –*

only to wobble, waft, drift off to ask,

*Was it I, lost and alone at the door, a sheaf  
unraveling in weather, now no longer  
held by the wind,  
content if I could be  
the most ordinary  
unwealthy flooring?*

When the fleet troop of choiring daughters  
taps across, he perks up enough  
to admire their trim lines, skirts  
asweep in the spring gusts  
circulating on beautiful autumn days,  
days like today.