

The Call

What's a woman thinking
to take off her apron, put the knife
down among the potatoes
half-peeled for supper
and leave, the screen door
closing behind her?

White sheets flap in the yard
— a blizzard of bees
covers her retreat.

It's a powerful notion
certainty let go.

My neighbor's mother walked away
from two kids, a sound husband
an apple tree planted
the year they were married—
didn't take even an extra
pair of shoes.

Gone ten years
she came back one Sunday
resigned to Salvation
—dinner on the table—
when the family got home
from church.
They never asked.
She never explained.

My mother tried it—
walked away from the farm
with me a babe in arms
& a cardboard suitcase
she lugged halfway to town
then turned around

& walked the other way
when the neighbor
offered her a ride
back home.

Better to leave it all
she said, take nothing
that could change your mind.

Sometimes late at night
when the moon is up
the wind right
& the owl in the fir tree
all afternoon has issued its
low, insistent call

I stand on the porch
barefoot in my nightgown
the front door ajar, my hand
on the knob & think
how easy to pull it shut

step down the path
through fireflies swarming
between juniper & broom
out the gate in the privet hedge
—close that too—
& keep going.

(Poets at the Faire, Jump Start!, The Imperfect Gravity of Pears)