

*Laura Kasischke*

THE CAUSE OF ALL MY SUFFERING

My neighbor keeps a box of baby pigs  
all winter in her kitchen. They are

motherless, always sleeping, sleepy  
creatures of blood & fog, a vapor

of them wraps my house  
in gauze, and the windows mist up

with their warm breath, their moist snores. They  
watch her peel potatoes, boil

water from the floor, wearing  
a steamy gown. She must be like

Demeter to them, but, like this weather  
to me, this box of pigs

is the cause of all my suffering. They smell  
of invalids, lotioned. Death is over there. When I

look toward my neighbor's house, I see  
trouble looking back

at me. Horrible life! Horrible town! I start  
to dream their dreams. I dream

my muzzle's pressed  
desperately into the whiskered

belly of my dead mother. No  
milk there. I dream

I slumber in a cardboard box  
in a human kitchen, wishing, while  
  
a woman I don't love  
mushes corn for me in a dish. In  
  
every kitchen in the Midwest  
there are goddesses & pigs, the sacred  
  
contagion of pity, of giving, of loss. You can't  
escape the soft  
  
bellies of your neighbors' calm, the fuzzy  
lullabies that drift  
  
in cloudy piglets across their lawns. I dream  
my neighbor cuts  
  
one of them open, and stars fall out, and roll  
across the floor. It frightens me. I pray  
  
to God to give me  
the ability to write  
  
better poems than the poems of those  
whom I despise. But  
  
before spring comes, my neighbor's  
pigs die in her kitchen  
  
one by one, and I  
catch a glimpse of my own face  
  
in the empty collection plate, looking  
up at me, hungrily, one  
  
Sunday—pink, and smudged—and ask it  
*Isn't that enough?*