

Song of the Secretary, Hot Lab

All day in a concrete brick building without
even one shaft of natural light, I learned
to stare windows into my typing as my Selectric
raced along at 74 words per minute.

Atomic symbols—Sr-90, Cs-137, I-131,
U-238, Pu-239—darkened my work
like birds tangled in the sky. But I fixed on
clouds of my own bored making,

the small droplets of my idle thoughts,
and I floated among them, oblivious to birds . . .
while on the other side of the wall—
beyond the photo of my kids and dog

lined up in birthday hats—I don't know why
or when, a lab technician innocently moved
a very important brick,
and so a window opened over my desk,

though I never saw its light. All the same,
rays flooded in, and the shadow
of those birds darkened my dosimeter,
and later the mammogram of my right breast.