

Soon I'll leave the little garret
I've spent five years in, groomed
and combed and grown used to,
where I bedded my lover
and housed my jubilation, relaxed,

fretted, and pined, grew used to.
A roommate once had an afghan-hound
with brown eyes like quicksand,
and such long spindly legs
it never could lie down right.

I used to watch the poor beautiful creature
circle, fold and unfold and fold
its legs again, trying,
for all the world, just to settle.

The Song / Denis Johnson

The small, high wailing
that envelops us here,
distant, indistinct,

yet, too, immediate,
we take to be only
the utterances of loose fan

belts in the refrigerating
system, or the shocked hum
that issues from the darkness

of telephone receivers;
but it speaks to us
so deeply we think it

may well be the beseeching
of the stars, the shameless
weeping of coyotes

out on the Mojave.
Please.
Please, stop listening

to this sound, which
is actually the terrible
keening of the ones

whose hearts have been broken
by lives spent in search
of its source,

by our lives of failure,
spent looking everywhere
for someone to say these words.

Extremity / Kathryn Stripling

Pity my cold feet in bed.
The doctor says I need warm blood
down there, gives me a tonic
that burns in my guts
not my feet. My toes curl
in the blankets like French knots
I used to pull so tight

the thread broke. My fingers dig
into my stomach. Small wonder
my dreams are of frost-bite,
my toes dropping off like ruined berries,
my fingers strewn over the snow.

When I wake I work hard until noon.
I collect every nail paring,
skin faint as snow on the pumice stone.
Even the hair woven into my comb
I can spin into strong, silver thread,
and I gather the stubs