

A Song for Kay Mullen

The flaming balls float when our hands
are busy elsewhere
juggling's easy: first, study hypnosis
and rock your finger
metronome in front of a cross
on the highway go back
to that day when one alphabet devoured
another. You have two animals
with their brights on, their eyes following
the ticktock rock of your finger,
so the cross with the dusty flowers
around its neck evaporates
under a mother's pillow.
If you've done your job right,
the locomotive lofts over her boy's truck
all squeal and shiver and brace.
He's on his way to work, 6:30 a.m.:
an airport needs to be built
and his body is burning to build it.
That night the mother wakes
to the creak of her son's hooves in the hall
when the boy gets up to pee,
and the sound of that gush is enough
to roll a mother over safe,
the red dial under her lungs spinning
this way and that,
where a husband sometimes reaches
to undress her and give thanks,
chandelier his skin upon her.
The tumblers under the red dial
click into place as the boy pees
and the mother listens

to the comforting steam of her children
breathing in those rooms
that box out around her and become her
larger body. Her heart spins
like the fiery wheel on her boy's pick-up
after it flips a half dozen times
but not tonight, not with you on the roadside
rocking your finger hypnotic
at the oncoming engine. In the closet,
even the feathers in the boy's coat
flutter a little then settle as he flushes
and the floorboards creak
with what keeps a mother's back
from breaking, the round piano
notes of a boy walking towards
his bedroom to sleep.