

Cultivating Mass

Let the peaceful young men work
their *bis* and *tris*.

Let's not begrudge
them their beach muscle.

This is not bitterness. Please, let them
never imagine their Clean and Press

is a casualty raised
up and over
a Humvee's up-armor.

Let them never know a body
weighs more unconscious

or consider that barbells are built
to be lifted, our bodies
to lie down.

Today I can deadlift four-oh-five.
When I can move four-ten

that will not stop a bullet
or
the overpressure of a bomb

flooding some tightened space,
never mind
the shrapnel and heat careening
through that rapid bloat
ripping—

But if lifting is not a prayer
why do my knees hurt?

Why lunge genuflections
in fifty-yard intervals
if not to make less fragile these legs

I beg to keep?
If the consecration of chalk buckets
is not a blessing

then the measured
tearing down of my tissue, the shallow

scarring of its muscle,
is not teaching this body reverence

to whatever
is in it that tells it—*cohere*.

But I say this is faith,
I am learning
to tighten myself together

and knowing
the little good it will do.

Let the peaceful young men believe
for awhile longer
anything otherwise.