

Ilwaco, Washington

On the other side of the kitchen door
down the stone hall, slumber.
Musicians in sleeping bags
on the sectional, on the floor,
deep in the lull of their mid-night.
It's eight a.m. or so.
I'm sitting at David and Gini's
narrow kitchen table drinking coffee,
eating jam on thick toast
from black dishes, up til three,
awoken by habit and now,
from habit aware
of all that is wrong
with my life and with me,
up. Twyla gets off my foot
and clicks over to the door again,
small square head and bat ears
lowered to the dusty crack
to see if anyone else is awake *yet*.

Last night at the Raven & Finch,
after the set, after they stopped
playing because they were supposed to,
the music, liquid,
flowing and wild all night,
edded over something underneath.
After everyone who still hadn't gone home
wasn't audience anymore,
after midnight, still playing
in the little stage area
between the wine-to-take-away
and the purple wall, the enormous
old-movie chandelier
brushing the top of the piano,
after Gini flipped the sign
to SHUT in the window
and turned everything off
but the tealights and the chandelier,
the parking lot light shone in on us,
on the square olive oil cans
topping the shelf, on the little wooden
models of hands, on the humidior
and the salvaged-wood bar,
on David piano and Dave drums,
of the same vintage, on Monica guitar
and the college kids,
allowed in the bar
because they're in the band,
Nick bass and Chris cello,
though they play everything,
tightroping over cords and amps
to trade seats, and Lew

the local, not nearly
as old as his teeth look,
with trumpets and trombone,
Gini loading the dishwasher
and people talking, still playing,
the parking lot light shone in on us
and in through the gallery window
across the way on a photo,
a rusty prow, DESIRE
in peeling white letters, the wine bar's
blue neon JAZZ sign reflected over it.

There's a lot of green
to look at this morning,
and a lot of gray above it out the windows
with the blinds that are never let down.
The sloping yard, the stole of trees,
brambles and then downward neighbors
unseen to 101, which is Spruce Street East
for eight blocks. Across the gray-green harbor,
the last chance for the river to delay
dealing with Cape Disappointment,
above the idling canneries,
the stoplight intersection, the bank/pharmacy
combination drive-thru,
there's the McMansion hill
with its oil-painting pines
and then up to the grays, pale clouds
in front of other clouds,
busy with zipping little birds
and unzipping Vs of larger birds
and earlier a flare over the water, tiny,
shockingly bright in the light gray.

Someone is putting out arrow signs
for the car rally later on
at the parking lot on the dredge spoils.
All the charter boats
there still are have gone out already
captained by the Rockys and Ray-Rays,
the Sea Hag Tavern patrons
of the world, into the difficult
and mighty waters.
From here I can't tell
which masts are docked
and which are dry-docked
for safekeeping, or for repair,
or beyond repair.
There was a tug on blocks,
leaning and rotted, that David's friend
who was a great drummer
lived on. He left a voicemail at the office once
about a game of cribbage this weekend,
about jamming again soon, Dah-veed,

good man, about getting the tug
back in the water. A deep
Old Man River sort of voice.
He signed off with "Carry on."
I never got to hear him play.

Twyla scratches at the door
and I chastise. A moment later
David barefoots heavily into the kitchen
in a thick white robe and Twyla wrenches
everywhichway hello.
He doubletakes at me, one side
of his silvered mane pompadoured,
and sort of grunts. I smile good morning
with my mouth shut. David makes coffee,
announces he's going back to bed,
coochie-coos Twyla, shuts the door gently
in her face and does so.
Twyla sits, back legs splayed out,
crestfallen and immodest.
I consider another attempt at sleep.
Or reading, or a walk. I should be helpful
and do the dishes from the two a.m. spicy noodles
Gini made for everyone.
I reject it all, this once,
settling in the big chair
with wide arms you could set a cup on
but maybe aren't supposed to.
Twyla hops up next to me
flipping over for a rub
and forgiving the world everything.
Everything she can think of
with her brain upside down.

A macho bird startles me
smacking its tiny self against the window
so hard it sounds like death.
Dave comes in, interrupting
my boredom, wide awake
and analyzing already,
polo collar up and tie-dye socks,
what worked what failed what's next.
Nick after a while, scratching his head,
flannel shirt open, smiling slowly
at the thought of coffee. Then everyone
is in the kitchen doorway
and Twyla can't decide who
should pet her first. Young Chris,
his sweatshirt tucked neatly in,
Monica in a striped shirt and striped ski cap
still mostly asleep
but going with it, Lew who'd left
before I got up is back, says
he'd gone to Astoria

and gotten a deal on ribs at Safeway.
Gini, black-and-red spiky hair
and hoody sweatshirt, and David, wet hair
slicked back, standard black T and jeans,
say good mornings all around
and start breakfast. Boulou, their boxer,
goes outside and paws her frisbee
so that it moves as if alive
so that she can stomp it, ears a-flap.
Everyone finds something to sit on.
No one finds anything to say.

Nick has trouble with the lid
on the coffee beans and Dave
talks about the can snackler,
remember? the thing they used to sell
on TV? that helped? open things,
the can snackler.
We're pretty sure it wasn't
called the can snackler.
Dave is sure, sure it was.
Twyla moves behind Gini at the stove
like a fireman waiting for a baby to drop,
fun is made of my PJ pants, white fleece
with Wonderbread dots, why are a mouse's balls
so small? says Dave. Because
so few mice can dance.
Look! Little bright yellow birds.
Finches! Where? There's one on the line,
three in the bush there. No,
three on the line. No, two in the bush.
We say what we can see
from where we are, laughing.
And then they make it music.

Two, David says, syncopating, on the
line. Three in the bush, three in the bush,
Dave drums his hands on the table, three in the bush.
David plays last night's wine bottles
with a wooden spoon, one on the line,
Monica and Chris run into the living room
and duet on the piano, four in the bush,
Lew be-bop-de-bah-bah-dups,
none on the line, Nick shakes the can
of coffee beans, Gini dings the toaster dial,
ding, ding, all on the line,
the worth in the hand. We hold the frames
for people to look through
at beauty, we put up fists
in people's faces
for them to look through the little hole
if they would just
close one eye to see.
There were maybe eight

other people last night
total, three or four at the very end,
when what was heard was amazing,
when what was amazing was heard.
I think of our unknown artist lives,
our artist lives unknown,
lived out in different boats
on the same water, and boats
aren't what we know how to make.
It's the nature of art to move
like the dangerous, beautiful
Columbia into the Pacific.
Most are wrecked.

But last night closed on,
of all things, a standard.
"Summertime..." sang a customer
in a pause from the couch,
"and the livin' is easy..."
She had a hell of a voice.
David and Gini have known her
for years and had no idea.
She stood and took a mic. Chris' cello
floated on the melody,
Nick trailed his fingers
through it on bass,
Monica and David picked up the gourds
covered in beads, the name of which
I can never remember, the ones
you have to move your whole body
to play, the current.
They traced the banks
of the river, its thousand
convoluted miles, and she sang.
Then Chris broke off down a tributary.
He set down his bow
and fingers hiking all over the strings
he went up high to its glacier,
brutal source, slight trickle
of aching cold that burns and carves rock
and bone when it can,
but then flows down where it can,
to join, to warm
to ease a while. "Summertime..."
Lew took it then, unmuffled trumpet
over Dave's drumming, slow
and broad. "Don't you cry..."