Ohio Violence
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*re-entry* by Michael White
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Selected by Anne Winters

*Mister Martini* by Richard Carr
Selected by Naomi Shihab Nye
Ohio Violence

poems by
Alison Stine

2008 Winner, Vassar Miller Prize in Poetry

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I am grateful to the editors of the following magazines, where many of the poems in this book first appeared:


Some of these poems first appeared in the chapbook Lot of My Sister (The Kent State University Press, 2001). Reprinted with permission of The Kent State University Press.

Thank you to all my friends, colleagues, and students over the years, particularly, for their assistance with this manuscript: Maggie Anderson, Allison Armbrister, Lauren Bandman, Eavan Boland, Charlie Clark, Alice Cone, Brad Daugherty, Karen DeVinney, Katy Didden, Mike Dombrowski, Kenneth Fields, Brigit Pegeen Kelly, June Kraus, Shara Lessley, John Miller, Ander Monson, Brian Moylan, Aimee Nezhukumatathil, Eric Pankey, and John Poch. Thank you to everyone at the Wallace Stegner Fellowship at Stanford University, The Poetry Foundation, Denison University, the University of Maryland, Grand Valley State University, Gettysburg College, and the Bread Loaf Writers’ Conference. Thanks especially to my family: my parents, Ashley, Andrew, James, and my husband Jordan Davis, for everything.

This book is dedicated to the memory of Paul Bennett, Richard Kraus, and Sara Medwid Gorsline.
I began in Ohio.
I still dream of home.

—James Wright
One
FIELDS BEYOND FIELDS

Since we lay in the fields beyond
the high school, the boys have returned
to claim them. The season is beginning.

Lights rasp the grass yellow.

The painted stripes shine like skin.

This is football country. We hold the coach
higher than the clinging hands of corn.

We carry him off the field.

In this town where everyone carries
a gun against the outside, teachers spoke
in the quiet of nicotine. Chalk clicked

like tongues. Without a pass,

I walked in halls lit as if by water.

To stop was to get caught. One hand memorized
the closed mouths of lockers.

The gym crossed its streamers

like secrets. My fingers passed over
metal, pebbled window glass, door knobs
numb against touch, and one, unlocked,
gave. We lay in the fields, and I

swear to you, nothing happened.

I was there. I loved him, and nothing
happened. Without our shirts,

the ground was cold and black,

full of living things that moved.

I could have touched him then, in the lightless
space between two cars on the highway.

I could have told him everything

he needed. To stop is to get caught.

The beaded tops of the wild sedge must have
tugged at his shirt, and caught

in his buttonholes, a ragged chance.

The cicadas were years from waking up,

and raising their armored heads in the long
grass to die. We lay in the fields,

our arms a last watch.

The car lights swept our bodies,

skinning us yellow, roaming over us like hands
which skim but do not touch.
ELEGY FOR THE INTERRUPTED

After the storm, the frog eggs fell.
The rain-wash hardened to a plink.

Small worlds burst open, gelatinous,
each with a dotted eye, the larva curled
like a black lash. How far they came,
ferried in the air like seeds, but seeds

who wake up in the world, lodged
in roof tops, tire swings, trees.

How would they ever find their way
to water? Answer: they would find it
in a jar. When I think about my body
formed in my mother, I think

of the order that must have been lost.
From brain to body blooming,

it is all about chemicals; it is always

about them, too much or too few
inhibited, the nerves frayed,
the blood lines blocked. At birth,

the chord can twist the neck; it can
choke (there is something

to be done about that), but first
there was absence: my ear done 
before it was done, before the drum 
learned to soak up sound and wire.

Such problems have no why, 
only what next. I don’t think

she knew, waited, like I do,

for the eggs to stir, unfurl 
their feet—or not, to never move, to sit 
stagnant in their trapped water.

Is it worse to act or not, to do nothing? Lack 
equals lack equals lacking—wait.

Send back to the brain a message:

we are through here.
I am late again, my body keeping its blood-store inside my belly like a stone. What does it need with all that blood? I have no use for a child.

I was a child. I wandered through the green wall to neighbors’ yards, my hair pinned with box hedge leaves. My mother warned against the sky,

but I swear I did not see it change, or it changed so quickly, gray to green like water deepened. That summer a man wore heels, a white wig,

and walked our streets. We swore he watched us in our sleep. From a block away, he whistled, his light hair hardly distinct from clouds.

When they went in his house they found rooms decorated for daughters—a red bike, a rope. I know the difference between late and lacking.

I know what waits in me, dark spot, clinging wire. How else was I to gauge my time, my life, but to walk past him, turn around, then run?
MOON LAKE ELECTRIC

We know our way by stars or smell,
   every collar of the gray road, every shape

   between the light switch and your corner

bed, iced in dark. Such is the course
our bodies found, settling the hollows.

   I taught you the adaptive skills,

to watch for the eye spark of deer or dog
along the drive. On the outskirts, we are linked

   by power, slick chords doubling

the horizon. A good marker, the sky—constant
   but for the flash of birds, and they have chosen

   to leave us. Or did we drive them away?

Moon Lake Electric pays thousands
for the raptors found dead beneath

   their humming poles. Blackened bodies,

or sometimes, no bodies—tufts, plate bones,
talons tight as if in the sexual helix.

   Fourteen golden eagles in one day,

and they don’t know what to do with them,
as I don’t know what to do with you.
Your moods carry me as the wind
lifts feathers from the matted earth. You can
harden me with the spiral of your skin.

You can open me with your mouth’s arrow.

Once I drove to you in a storm so thick, everything
around me fell away. Across the bridge,

I tracked the light of trucks, then nothing.
There’s a clearing where the poles

make angles out of air, grid the light

between road and more road. If you go, look
for the boundary, the curl in the stratus layers—

my body, tight as if you never
touched me, cochlear, clutching the wire. You think
I don’t know that I am the one?

All the world does is give me signs.
Ohio Violence

By the road they leave the body. Deer,
dead deer in Ohio. Deer Hit Special—
the auto shop’s sign. In the grass are

various states. Head, no head.

Tail, no tail. Neat pile only of limbs.

I learned early to differentiate. This is
not a beast. This is part. This was once:

the buck my brother’s dog

brought up from the woods one summer,

trip by trip, a tipped hoof, leg joint. A tiny
dog, it could only carry what it could

carry. All summer, small burials.

The corn bled of green. You want to find

light. You want a picture. I understand.
The story I would tell you, if you came,

is not my story: a girl brought

her rival out to a field, and surprised her.

Watching in the rearview, the man
they both wanted, and had. Out here,
we measure our places in blood,
bones in the weeds, the buried well.

Each brick brought a message in her
fifteen-year-old fist. This story requires
more telling, requires call
and response. It won’t shake from me:
the lavender woods, the man—years older—
the leaf felt and hair. Underneath my skin
is a city. Underneath my skin
is a crying out. You want to find light.

You want a picture. Break me open again.