

## Ohio Violence

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# Ohio Violence

poems by  
Alison Stine

*2008 Winner, Vassar Miller Prize in Poetry*

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*I began in Ohio.  
I still dream of home.*

—James Wright

*One*

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# 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.

## CURFEW

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.