

Words in Solstice Time

TERRY OFNER

i

Orange light on the back gate.
The longest day dawns, zeros out the night
retreating to shade on the other side.
In the first time there wasn't any.
In the second there's only one escape:
You must sit still forever.
Mama sits still. She is well into it.
She is impossible to see.
The shortest distance between—
a pencil might define it, or a command:
Write tinier lines. Inscribe the Torah
on the head of a nail. Drive it,
syllable by syllable, into mind.
Read it out as Qur'an.

ii

The light stops here.
There's a pile-up at the gate.
I am curious, though I have no desire
to go through just yet.
I hear water over there: Concerto
with moments and stones.
I've caught glimpses of lilies too,
licking up the orange.
A line goes on forever.
But even forever fails
in the face of the real thing.
Orange fails as well, sheds its skin,
hitches a ride on the flesh
of the lily—forever flower.

iii

I hear my granddaughter.
My wife has her on speaker.
She makes a sound like a bird
from the Jurassic. She is prehistoric.
She is full of motion and life.
She runs out of view. Stillness
proves nothing but itself. Still,
it builds, like water's lust for rest.
Mama crossed over years ago.
Daddy, too. There's a pile-up.
A bird makes a sound like a daughter,
or a daughter's daughter
laughing, crying, laughing.
This mother tongue.