

Marianne Boruch

Work

Chicago – and the days of the terrible job,
 the terrible ride to work above neighborhood
 and neighborhood, every window below
 caught in the same torn curtain, or so it seemed
 from the El, a thing dizzy with its own
 volts and brakes. I pressed my cheek
 against the glass and kept looking: even the flashing
 backyards turned ancient, each
 almost a square, pinned down with a chair
 tilted backward or broken. How long is anyone
 twenty-three or four – endless moment
 dragged through its bored cousins. *Years.*

And my job: papers into files, files
 into their buzzing slots, day after day
 at the great university. Near Christmas, nothing
 much to do, my office mate hummed
 as she sewed and folded ornaments, her desk
 an acre of sequins and ribbon. I typed
 deep into the early twilight – poems – and stared
 them through. Poor things. It was like walking
 sideways into the massive heart – a heart
 as big as a room – at the Museum of Science and Indus-
 try,
 following the dim light
 in the blue-pitched veins, that gun barrel
 double rap in my head. Someone's
 real heart, the guide said, amplified one hundred times.

Coming home, I'd see the old man
 severed at the waist, and walk by quickly.

Each day he'd set up at the El, his odd little chair,
his can of frosted ballpoint pens. I once
bought two. Pretty soon – I don't know.
I quit before long. By then, it was summer.
The half-man in his tee shirt
began to balance bottle
onto bottle into a glittering, threatening lace.
Look out, he'd say, rolling
back on his ball bearings the size of a fist,
careful of us, loving our danger.