

White Door

Ed said that if you're going to talk about unhappiness
 you have to mention pleasure too,
 and as he spoke I watched a miniscule brown spider
 scramble up the seam of his green shirt,
 headed for his soft, college-educated neck.

We were painting the front door of Margaret's apartment,
 making a real mess, flecking the stone steps
 and flower beds
 the grass and the geraniums,
 getting it into our eyebrows and our hair.

We were painting it white,
 so she could find it easily
 when she came home late from work,
 in the dark New England winter 5 PM,

and looking at the spray of lines around Ed's eyes
 his moderate pot belly,
 and how he didn't care about ruining his pants,
 I forgave him something he had done the year before.

That was the year the new drug started working,
 pushing back the sickness inside me,
 burning out the fire in my blood
 by starting another fire —
 leaving me utterly tired each night but clear.

How accidental it all seems from here, how
 casual, beautiful, bittersweet —
 when we stood up from the job,
 the sky was like a pale blue cloth
 scribbled on by jets
 streaked with watermelon juice and shredded, honey-colored cloud;

the spattered steps and rags and brushes
looked like a proverb about work,
about how much damage is involved
in getting something done.

And two years later Ed got spiritual and moved out west.
And my life strayed off its course
like a tarnished light in fog.

And Margaret, home late again,
gets out of her car in Maine,
with her briefcase in one hand and the plastic bag
of take-out in the other —
and the dark apartment and the sidewalk and the white door.