

Evidence

Early, before the sun had breathed colour
into the sky, he rose and drove eighty miles
to quiet ditches and drainage channels
darkened by run-off from fields dressed in nitrates,
and counted evidence of water voles he never saw:
neat pellets of excrement, the odd footprint,
skid marks of a belly sliding down a mud bank – signs
that took the place of a beating heart held in a palm.
The pale afternoon sang to him as he drove home,
stomach rumbling, an empty coffee cup
rolling like a tipsy pal on the seat beside him.

In their house she chopped apples, turned the pages
of a recipe book with an index finger
dampened on her tongue. Their small child,
crowned in fiery curls, butted at her legs
insistent as a fly wanting to get through
a closed window pane. And though this was
before the time when stones filled their mouths,
something parched in her throat made her talk to him
about the elusive beasts, and not about the two
of them, flexing their wings in the velvet dusk.