

## MAINTENANCE

Sometimes the best I can do  
 is homemade soup, or a patch on the knee  
 of the baby's overalls.  
 Things you couldn't call poems.  
 Things that spread in the head,  
 that swallow  
 whole afternoons, weigh down the week  
 till the elastic's gone right out of it —  
 so gone  
 it doesn't even snap when it breaks.  
 And one spent week's  
 just like the shapeless bag  
 of another. Monthsful of them,  
 with new ones rolling in and  
 filling up with the same junk: toys  
 under the bed, eggplant slices sweating  
 on the breadboard, the washing machine  
 spewing suds into the toilet, socks  
 drying on the radiator and falling down  
 behind it where the dust lies furry and  
 full of itself . . . The dust!  
 what I could tell you about  
 the dust. How it eats things —  
 pencils, caps from ballpoint pens,  
 plastic sheep, alphabet blocks.  
 How it spins cocoons  
 around them, clumps up and  
 smothers whatever strays into  
 its reaches — buttons,  
 pennies, marbles — and then  
 how it lifts, all of a piece,  
 dust-pelts  
 thick as the best velvet  
 on the bottom of the mop.

Sometimes

the best that I can do  
 is maintenance: the eaten  
 replaced by the soon-to-be-eaten, the raw

by the cooked, the spilled-on  
 by the washed and dried, the ripped  
 by the mended; empty cartons  
 heaved down the cellar stairs, the  
 cans stacked on the ledge, debris  
 sealed up in monstrous snot-green bags  
 for the garbage man.

And I'll tell you what  
 they don't usually tell you: there's no  
 poetry in it. There's no poetry  
 in scraping concrete off the high chair tray  
 with a bent kitchen knife, or fishing  
 with broomhandle behind the fridge  
 for a lodged ball. None in the sink  
 that's always full, concealing its cargo  
 of crockery under a head  
 of greasy suds. Maybe you've heard  
 that there are compensations? That, too's  
 a myth. It doesn't work that way.  
 The planes are separate. Even if there are  
 moments each day that take you by the heart  
 and shake the dance back into it, that you lost  
 the beat of, somewhere years behind — even if  
 in the clear eye of such a moment you catch  
 a glimpse of the only thing worth looking for —  
 to call this compensation, is to demean.

The planes are separate. And it's the  
 other one, the one called maintenance,  
 I mostly am shouting about.  
 I mean the day-to-day,  
 that bogs the mind, voice, hands  
 with things you couldn't call poems.  
 I mean the thread that breaks.  
 The dust between  
 typewriter keys.