

Dispute

Just because you say there was a scorpion in the bed
doesn't mean, the hotel manager tells you,
that there was one in the bed. Nor does it mean
you deserve another room. This is an old dispute,
and winning isn't winning since any claim you make
makes another claim that you're a liar. Add detail,
say, a cufflink, or the precise angle the sun hit the other noun,
and you're too earnest, like the child coming up
from the basement to ask his parents
if they've ever noticed how the coffee table is broken;
he leaves, he returns, reports that in trying to fix it
he broke it more. The worry that every telling
is a form of mangling. A morning in June
when your love still sleeps in the house you step outside of
and into the light before the dawn, the light
that wakes the birds you can't see in the Rose of Sharon—
that "that" that you know better than to describe. You swear
the scorpion was there—your clumsy hands (one in a shoe)
smashed then flushed the real thing into a useless,
unidentifiable abstraction. It makes you wonder
what you really want. But then the hotel manager tells you
"The customer is always right," her fingers fashioned
into ironic quotation marks around the foot-long pocket
of empty air in front of her. She sighs. And at last you can move.