

Gentle, we say again and again, hoping
the suggestion sinks in rather than loses

its meaning like when you say thermometer
so many times you decide that can't be right.

Thermometer? Thermometer.
There must be an alternate pronunciation,
a different noise we can utter in the dark.
Our default setting is alert, every nerve

leaning toward the child. When the numbers
rise to 103, 104, 105, I remember the towers

had 110 stories each. Maybe my alarm system
has been set for decades. Maybe some day,

I'll talk about the stupid plastic sandals
I wore on my evacuation, how the blisters

felt right, evidence that I was wide awake.
(Cross reference: Inventory at Twenty.)

It took fifty boxes to move, each one
with a label like Linens of the Master Bedroom

or Toiletries of the House. I've got my eye on
a bird feeder for the little wrens,