

Jennifer Bartlett
from Hypnagogic Diary

*You must fall asleep before the birds begin
of there's no hope for it.*

—Gertrude Stein

for jc

I.

Alone, waiting for the light
to turn in its particular language
the plastic dime-store stars
come out one by one, an occasional
cloud drifting over. In this
white screen refrain
the mind reiterates what the body
thought it had forgotten;
such as, *when one moves too quickly
the soul is left behind*. Such as,
I have moved too quickly. Or,
bells swing in an airless room
without any hand reaching up to touch them.

VI.

Two people speak inside
this space held in darkness, *a kind of
unlistening, a kind unlistening*.
What he means to say is lost,
obscured by sleep's strange
vernacular. She will wait
until morning to decipher,
to sort the thing out. Outside
she can hear the cars
rushing toward their own
variation on reality, knowing

that one way to find beauty is
in the absence of it.

VII.

In the next room, before light-
fall, you move about
with your familiar tick
of silver against glass.
The sound of the water,
constant in its drifting,
lulls me back
in some kind of ritual where
things mean to stand for other things.
As I rise to the surface
I realize these are not your gestures
but those of another
that hold me, keep me in place
proving the unconscious—
in order to make itself comfortable—
will pull any series of tricks.
Before, in the dream, there were flowers
like an arrangement of signs.

Jennifer Bartlett's poems have appeared in *First Intensity*, *The Boston Globe*, *Blue Mesa Review*, *Conceptions SouthWest*, *Bughouse*, *smallspiralnotebook*, and *Psalm 151*. She is the editor of Saint Elizabeth Street Press. Her first book, *Derivative of the Moving Image*, is forthcoming from the University of New Mexico Press. She lives in Brooklyn with the writer, Jim Stewart, and their son, Jeffrey.