Paradise

Once I lay in the lassitude of summer,

rocking the sky's slow boat

looking up the skirts of a sorority of poplars. The wind rose and the grey leaves panicked

in a silver school and swam south,

But not far south, and the sky above

was a lapis scrim of unbroken

thought. Benazir Bhutto had died on the morning of that day, all over the world, and I felt guilty

even being here. But there was the gentle sky

And it was going nowhere and blaming no-one fast—a vast intelligence canvassing nothing special,

drawn taut and candid and empty

Over the whole carnal world. A charged void, the flip side of knowledge,

The other side of pleasure, and there could have been nothing wrong in the world—nothing at all—

but then the wind stirred, and I fell from the sky's sly boat back into the hammock and remembered

All of them. But Paradise, in my experience,

is only herself for minutes at a time.

Outside of that, she's the possum shitting in the ceiling above you; she's your man and his children from his first time round; she's the house and the copperhead under it,

And the mortgage over it, and she's the parrots flaring

at dusk. Most of it is shit,

my doctor said to me once, a man whose love and medicine had failed to save his wife, a man caring for three teenagers now.

Hating it and loving

Them. Most of love is shit. But this is the best

I will ever have been, I was thinking,

hanging there from the sky; and that second, I stopped being it and started missing it, and the wind fell and rose again.

And later my son found me

And fell into the hammock with me,

the very cradle of his world.

I just want *you*, the boy said, as though I really *were* something. I rocked with him a while,

and then we stepped down and walked back

Into the lengthening afternoon

of the rest of our days. And the morning after,
I woke and saw that the word had got out early and written itself all over
the place, especially in the east but also

on the leaves of the grasses, in colours

The holy spirit would have been proud of

back in the old days,

before she unstopped the world's bottle and seeped like some profound and original sin

well into next week.

—Mark Tredinnick