

My father talks

Conor Bracken

about the hyenas he saw outside Harar,
and the men who fed them scrapmeat
from their mouths and of course

I think of language, of the tongue
and what we hang out of our mouths
because we want something to come

and wrest it from us,
enjoy the gristle, pop, and gnaw,
but I always do this,

make bad metaphors of moments
and try to tape transparencies
over the shifting world

as it erases itself a little bit at a time
so instead of that
here's the stonewalled city

that brims with yellow light
as night falls crumb by starry crumb
into the dusty cup of it.

Here's the dusty beat-up Nissan
my father drives
out of the dented fortress,

the headlights that catch sixty eyes
like bright pennies
glowing underwater.

The raw red gobbets
held out to them
and the soft crunch

of stones as the hyenas approach.
Their mouths open like a book
in which terrible things are written.

"And the darkness?" I ask.
"How would you describe it."
"I'd say cavernous," he replies

"but that would make every hyena's mouth
a cave-let, so let's go with velvety"
and we like that.

It makes the night an enormous curtain
that you can roughen with one hand
and smooth with the other.