

NOW THAT WE KNOW THE WORLD IS ENDING

TIM DEJONG

and the children are happily asleep,
happily ignorant of what is to come,
I will go out with you to the garden,

folds of the deepening evening
laid around us and folding
us into their slow disappearing.

I will smoke one cigarette and try
to think of nothing, watch the geckos
that hide beneath the limestone rocks

emerge for their nighttime hunt.
Most facts, I know, are now
easily available and acquired. They are

the same ones I can never remember,
like whether Daylight Saving
Time is beginning or ending,

or who won the World
Series three years ago. All these pass
through my life like so much chaff.

Either one learns what's worth holding
on to or one doesn't, and guesses.
October wind, insistent and crisp,

quickenings, blesses by taking me back
for one second to a time before time
took on the meaning it now has, its meaning

clouded over by accretion of data.
Quiet flows the river into which
our words float once we have said them,

escaping the flotsam by which
we're driven on into a tumult of noise.
What is this ocean below us, behind?

Our tiny lives, our apportioned
shadowed joys, suburban, subdivided,
circumscribed – lives grown out of

tiny patter out of elementary minds
conscious only of love and of mild rebuke.
From that long-ago place to one, now,

we both need and rue: the unknown
less unknown, we less alive or more
alive to whatever in life's superfluous,

neither rare untainted joy
nor near-reached significant
toil. So little left, it seems,

in the too-yielding soil, though I've guessed
enough to know just this –
not even what we know teaches what's next.

Love – what it gave us, what
through it we learn to give,
is what we are here for. We can't,

should not go back. We can but touch
askance that still unmuddied space
the child inhabits, wakening, adrift in what

becomes the life one can't escape,
must learn to wear as armor
or as prayer for what's in store.