THE DARK IS A DOOR

by

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Introduction

When you read Susan Deal's poems, think of yourself as a dowser, an old-time water witcher holding in your hands a fork of cottonwood or willow or hemlock. Think of her poems as witching wands, lean, spare, barkless, as fresh as slippery wood and as apparently artless. But only apparently. Because as simple as they appear, usually right out of her prairie landscape, they are not. They have the same resonance that a dowser transfers from his arms and hands to the wood of his trade. And it is this vibrancy, this electricity in the grain, which marries him to the land.

This is the way Susan Deal writes, out of herself, primarily into the distance and dark, and always down. Few poets move as simply down the page as she does. Read one or two poems and you will know the art of her delicate touch. Not that she won't shock you by writing brutal realism; she does. But more often than not she trusts that rare sensitivity of hers to take her slimly down, letting it intuitively choose her way and hunch her toward encounters. And it is only in those moments of overtakelessness, after she has gone through a world of *as ifs*, that we rest with her at the ends of her poems. There we know what she knows, we hear her original voices of love and despair, and we come to terms with the deeper nature of her prairie world: the green odor of corn, the raw shapes of spring, and, of course, always "the wind and the wind."

But it would be too easy to say that Susan Deal has lived under the vast sky of Nebraska and that this vastness has taught her the quick, careful measure of her eye. Thousands of people grow up on the prairie and can't see what she does. Or the way she does. On a prairie, sight may be an act of definition, but first it is an act of creation, and Susan Deal knows this. When we read her poems, we feel we are in the presence of someone who looks things into existence. Horses, cattle, wind-blistered trees, tent caterpillars, watering tanks, even starlight and the taken-for-granted sky. Then she starts to work. If the distance dwarfs, she enlarges. If the wind threatens to uproot, she digs down. If the cold cracks the bark, she heals it with a tough tenderness. And always like the trees she writes about, she is resilient and hard, branching out in her own way, an articulate survivor in the heat and the wind.

Watch the way her poems begin. Hers is an enabling talent, letting a subject have its own way before she asks what its essence is. That simple invitation to things to come into her consciousness is what first attracted me to Susan Deal. She has always worked on the other side of presump-

tuousness, and this humility is vital to her art. To stand in the presence of ordinary things without asserting herself enables her to absorb them before she begins. In the book's title poem she opens the door to the dark, but it is the dark which hosts her, letting her in. And later when she writes

As it softly always will
the cardinal comes
to the feeder this morning

she plays the host, but a hushed one, joining herself to the bird as quietly as possible, hearing what it hears. And this poem is like so many of Susan Deal's: there is an intense quiet, as if we were in the center of a silent, but reverberating bell. Or as she says, threading among the grasses like "the thin needles/ of sunlight."

If you can, though, read her slowly and listen to her poems' sounds. Contemporary poetry tends to be long on subjects and short on art. Too much genus; too few species. But Susan Deal not only has a special voice; she is a throwback in her use of sounds. Listen to the long vowels in these lines, crying to be heard:

Stones at our feet and gravel
reveal old faces. Noises
and whispers, wind in the leaves,
cries in the distance, speak
with a voice that we've heard.

If the dark, as she says in this poem, is "a place before the word," it is not a place before sounds. Here sounds fill the dark as subtly and as richly as they do so many of her other poems, becoming appropriate music to her tones, and almost always feasts for our ears. Read her in this way and you will catch the more complete notes of her verse.

But also note her use of present participles, the way things are always in the process of becoming: *blooming, rolling, spinning, pulling, oozing, leaning, writhing, grinding, sinking.* Her poems are full of kineticism. Therefore, when we come upon a calf "dead in/ the fences," barbed wire snarled around his legs and head, "stiff now almost/ to marble," in the context of the book this frozen image is even more arresting. But this is the way Susan Deal works, back and forth, variously, her clear poems like threads in a seasonal tapestry. And she knows the country as few women writers do. When she says she is one who was "born in the open" and bears "wounds of starlight,/ moonlight, light like/ crystals that slash," we believe her. Some prairie poets are as soul-less as water, but not this one.

Finally, read the way she brings precision and care to the edges of her sights and sounds. Here is no blurred world. From the finest edges she

pulls us into the most resonant centers. Because of this, Susan Deal and Ahsahta make a good marriage. In a world of disposable art, theirs keeps getting better.

Don Welch
Kearney, Nebraska
June, 1984

The Dark Is a Door

The dark is a door
you can open or a window
or a curtain that
will slide free,
letting you in.
The dark is tonight,
with stars pendulous
as white buds,
bobbing and blinking on
a huge black bush,
always on the verge
of blooming open.
We go through
the dark door into
the hush and alien splendor
of grasses at night.
Of crickets whittling
away at something.
Of the cool, damp trunks
of trees. Of flowers closed
and still and dreaming
on their stalks. We do not
talk. We move carefully
into the dark. Deep to our
right and left, before and
behind, the night things are
with us, awake and watching.
In this world, something
in us aches of the familiar.
Dark, dark blood stirs.
We open the door of the dark
to enter a history, a memory.
Stones at our feet and gravel
reveal old faces. Noises
and whispers, wind in the leaves,
cries in the distance, speak
with a voice that we've heard.

We enter these nights trying
to answer. Close to a secret,
we tremble with words.
But the dark is a door we can
only voicelessly enter,
a place before the word.

Widower

I think of the dark,
how black it can get
in the country. Where it's
impossible to divide
the blackness from your
hands, know them by
your sides. Where you are
is so scrambled by disguise,
making you think you are
somewhere you are not.
How in such blindness,
you could become three or
four different bodies,
three or four different
voices calling to each other.
I think of that old man
we visited once, twelve miles
from town, chickens overrunning
his wifeless house. I imagine
him lying there in his dark,
yellow chicks running through
his house like lights, little
lanterns near his bed, and
him leaning down to touch them,
to find where his separated
hands might be.

Dreaming His Right Hand

He walked to the
edge of the field,
a hundred yards,
before he dropped
to his knees with
the shock. The
arm running down
to a stump. His right
hand gone in the
flashing chain of
the cornpicker.
Black pain in every
bone, cacophonous
as the shrills of a crow.
The sharp hard caws
of blood splurting
and the sun, a red hot
rock spinning in the
heaving skies. He
walked to the house
in a dream. The heavy
earth thumping through
each leg marching
him home. Under him dust
drinking the blood
that dripped through
the hole of his hand.
Now in his sleep,
the metal hand is
cold, is quiet, but his
arm still rings. Twitches
like strung wire and
remembers down to the
absent cells. He dreams
his hand is there, close
to the rear wheel, in a
brown glove, like a dead

brown bird which he cannot
pick up nor bury. In a
burst of wind, the fingers
or feathers still living.

Phantom Limb

Watching from the road
to get a clue of you,
I sense you there
like a phantom limb.
A motion. A glitter
of moving leaves.
A shadow cast, when
the hard sun sinks
behind a cloud.
Your ghost bark darkens,
like a shadow.
I sense you there
stuck in my mind
with your long roots
driven to the center
of that hill. A memory
I cannot send away.
The form of where
you used to be indelible
in the cells. I cannot
pass this way without a
look at you. The feel
of you. My eyes go back
to that empty prairie hill
by habit.

Out in the Fields

Out in the fields,
three school friends
continue to roll over
and over, wrapped in
a metal cocoon.
Rolling the
fields up and the starry
nights. Beer cans
rolling against the
dashboard, making more
star bursts on the
windshield. I go back
down these old roads
slowly. Sense their
turning down the dark.
Their loose bodies rustle
to a stop and begin
to roll again with sudden
gusts of wind. Or what
do I hear, this falling
of bodies on top of each
other. The metal crushing.
It is not just the corn.
Out there
something's gone out of
control. And rolls away
and away from me. I can
not catch my grief.

Snapshot

This is the mood
and this is the light.
It is crossing our
path today in this hour.
Holding as still as
the picture I hold of
you. You in the center
of an afternoon snapshot.
With my finger to the
gloss, I touch your hand.
We are stopping the
world now from its
spinning and spinning.
Together suspended
between these guylines
of light. Touching
each other with the
cottonwood's shadow, its
lace work of shade. The old
light and the old mood
binding us tight. And you
haven't gone off to the
right side of this picture.
My finger pressed to your
hand, I feel the shadows
of the branches moving between us
until the threads of
light wear thin and
tear away. Until I am
loose in the dark with
a snapshot, drifting
upstream a hundred months
away. While you flow
back in the opposite
direction.

Distant Cousins

At the end, I want to walk
up and over the next hill
to come down where they are
arranging themselves for
this last picture. Come
down and see how they have
pulled the upright piano
out of the soddy and every
chair. I want to find one
chair positioned to the side,
inviting me.

Though they must sense me
coming, just out of their reach,
beyond their vision, a fifth or
sixth cousin, they look so tense
and so intent on showing a decent
posture to the world. As if they
didn't know what would come of
this or were afraid whose future
hands they would fall into.

I want to walk down and release
them into laughter. Send them back
off stage to where they best perform.
Him, not yet gnawed to death by wind,
back to the black fields plowing.
And her still undespairing to the
elderberries flooding the next canyon.
And I am here now, my hands on the
door of this picture, so that they
can, at last, let themslves go.

Uncle

My uncle walks up from
the main house, his boots
gone dead. They snuff
in a mat of night-blue
snow. He walks in long
strides recounting losses.
Three calves dropped too
early, frozen by morning.
Their legs stiff as the
handles of shovels buried
under snow. Now the lame
dog he has to shoot and
bury. Old cattle dog,
curled in a broken comma
by the barn. Behind him
his children weep and curse
his hardness. They break
away from him faster and
faster. Close to the wrench
of the barn door his boots
eat stars. The barrel shoots
out its hard, sure fire.
His dog kicks loose, hushing
even the snarl of winter moons.

The Calf

Dead in
the fences, we
unsnarl the
barbed wire
from his
legs and head.
Stiff now almost
to marble.
Where, I wonder,
was he trying
to go. With only
more of the flat
brown pastures
on the other side.
More of the same
sweet dust.
We pull him
out a little
and drop him down.
Begin to mend the
torn fences.
The red hot sun
crawling down
the sky. Far away
mirages
sparkle like water.

Dowser

It is as if he
is some sort
of wind erosion,
shaped out of
the soil. Honed
out of the hills.
The musk thistle
color of his eyes.
His belonging body
in the way he
cinches horses
or lifts the bales
of hay. The tilt
of his head when
the wind comes,
knowledge of clouds
and where streams
are hidden. The
forked branch of
cottonwood witching
for water. His
practiced arms
magnetized. Hands
spread above the earth
like taut roots.

At the Watering Tank

At the watering tank
we water the horses.
The sun like a dark
yellow skin on the
water will not reflect
our faces. The windmill
churns in commotion
above our heads.
Out of the saddle,
turned toward the north,
I watch the weeds shimmy
in gusts of wind. Stand
still and shimmy. Brown
and yellow, brown.
The hills run on and
over, on and over. The
saddles expand and contract
with the breathing of
horses. Then for an instant
I know that there are no
other countries. That there
is nothing besides the weeds
and the wind and the wind.
The noon day sun, this hill.

Born in the Open

We who are born
in the open bear
wounds of starlight,
moonlight, light like
crystals that slash,
scarred by drought
and blizzard.
Born in the open,
we must twist to the
tune of the wind,
bend back, weave
forward in hours that
crawl through the grain
and into the throats
of the flowers. Born in
the open, the calligraphy
of an intense hand
marks us, erases,
marks us again. Tracks
of the thistle, prints
of coyote, beaver, deer,
against our skin.
Born in the open, marked
and marking, we put our
imprint on the air,
we give our scent to the wind.

What If You Didn't Resist

What if you didn't resist.
If you threw your arms
wide open into it.
Letting it take you.
Where would you go?
What if you didn't resist.
If you trusted the light completely
and the darkness. The stroking
of dawn. The spear points of stars.
Trusting the spring and the winter.
What if you gave it up
and surrendered.
Accepting the flesh and the veins,
the vines, the bones and the soil.
Accepting the weight of the air,
your ephemeral body.
Where would you drift to?
If you didn't resist would you
rise. Would you fall.
Would you sink to the bottom,
the muddy, darkened light
of living. Would you rise in
the sun clear air.
If you relaxed the knots of
muscles holding, slackened the
mind that binds and ties,
severed the doubt of letting go.
What in the loose, what in the surrender,
would you know?

This moment nothing resists
in the limbs that are swaying,
open to the pull of this sudden wind.
Nothing denies in the lift of the
blue jay, winging up, beating up,
wide open, closing. Taking and
giving in the arms of it all.

Horses in the Rain

Horses in the rain,
the dull, damp bodies;
the dark, dull color
of horse hair, earth,
seeming so much a part
of the other that only
when they take a step
or shiver, the drops of
rain a quick white
shower, do I know that
they are there. How
camouflaged, how muddy
they become. The mind
at first does not
differentiate the horses
from the earth. Continual
rain blurring all colors
together. And I too must
be washing into the trunks
and twigs of these trees
in my brown coat, brown
hair, same color as the
wet brown branches. The
mind and body holding a
wooden stillness.

Grazing Cattle

As we walk across the fields
they are lifting their
heads, lifting their slow
heads from grazing.
Forgetting the vegetable
kingdom of weeds and
grasses, the vegetable
kingdom of slow chewing.
From all this they are
lifting their heads,
all ten white-faced,
like things coming
up from vegetable sleep.
They watch us come closer,
the murk of their brown eyes
clearing to take us completely
in, like clumps of grass
pulled up all at once.
Poised, there is a clear
stillness of being awake.
We are images only in the
quiet kingdom of their eyes.
Then their heads descend
in a row of slow motion to the
stomach sleep that we are not
part of. To a dream where we
don't belong.

Too Large for Balance

The sky is too
large for balance.
It trips over our
heads making us
dizzy. And the
hills too are lopsided
and unstill, stumbling
into one another, like
collapsing dominoes.
The trees lean on
each other for
support, balance
precariously on
the horizon.
And now the unstable
color of dusk slides
down on all sides and
brings a flat moon.
In this land,
birds are gyroscopes
that spin and whirl,
trying to keep it
together. Their wing
beats, precisioned constants.
The rhythm of barbed
wire fences ties the
space in, where it
leans and almost
crushes the unpracticed
eye. Coyotes and deer
thread through the
leaning hills. One
wrong step and the land
will unfasten,
the canopy of clouds
and air collapse.

Gravity

Gravity that pulls the
headstones over, pulling
the slates apart. The old
names peeling into dust.
The twist of gravity and wind,
thicker in the open with
the whole of earth pulling,
the whole of wind and its
rapid twists and thrusts.
And the single tree gnarling
there in the center, spreading
its thick knots of leaves
over the thinning stones.
As if green leaves alone
could keep the round wind off
or push the gravity of the
earth away. Gravity in the
dips and swirls of a flock
of dancing birds. In the
bulk of heavy hills rolling.
In the battering waves of
metal seas. The magnet of
gravity swirling with a furious
hand the red, gold leaves
until their color is a brilliant
blur, until leaves turn mulch
and dust. High and here I
meet the force of gravity.
The hills concaved and molded.
This sky pressed out to blue.
The iron fence that bounds this
graveyard irregular, leaning,
pulled askew. Feather and flesh,
soil and stone pulled down,
sucked on. All thickness
going thin. The weighted
going soft. The fine, fine

stuff of light oozing out
and everywhere in a thin,
gold dusk. As if gravity
draws and draws always for
the light, down to the darkest
core. Moving the static
into flux. And all along
my arms and in my hair, the
suck and yank of gravity,
gravity. Moving the blood,
moving the breath of me,
high and here, in a dance of
particle and light. Hill and
bird and voice collapsing
into silence, as gravity sucks
the dark down slowly and the
lighter stars bob up.

Almost Crushed by the Weight

Almost crushed by the
weight of the world here.
By the heft of the
spaces balanced on my
shoulders. By the
large sky hanging above
by a thread of cloud,
supporting. Almost crushed
by the wideness of the
enormous world. No
bumping of elbows with
anything. How small
we are, the barns, the
fences, six little windbreak
trees, tiny black lines
in the distance. How
intense, how heavy the
world leans. It is out
here, everything. Aware
of our thinness, our weakness.
The world's strength crushing
and yet so benevolent today.
Caressing our faces with
feathers of wind, with the
hands of a curious child.
Touching with hands so
controlled and so careful.

Wind-Blistered Trees

Wind-blistered trees,
leaning in ditches,
stripped of their bark,
their color, like old
men maybe, with their
heads between their
hands on park benches
who never raise their
faces or when they do
have eyes with a vacant
look as if lightning
struck them somewhere,
or sometime ago. As if
they can't remember
they put their heads
back down in a daze
just like old trees lean
away from the wind trying
to recover from the
blow that bent them,
pushed them to their
knees, too weary to
straighten.

She Says the Wind

She says the wind
could make her crazy
living on the hill.
How it twists the
boards, bends them
back into something
inside out.
And thoughts too,
twist on their
hinges, creak like
dungeon doors, about to
fly open. How it
bumps up and down
in the chimney,
all day long
like obscene words,
rising and falling.
And at night the feel
of it, those dry-ice
hands, teasing and
pinching her into
dreams of frenzy.
She has seen it more
than once, madman,
stomping at will through
her locked and bolted house.
We gather round to listen
and to see how she has
warped in places. Her
hands nervous, wringing in
the shapes of broken beats,
as if under her flesh
exists not bones nor blood,
but acres of trapped and
writhing wind.

So Long Being out of My Country

So long being
out of my country,
deep in sleep,
I can hear the
roar of plains,
the heavy breathing
of the river valley
calling. I sit up
in the dark dragging
my body back from
where it has run off
to again. Its hair
all matted. Dust on
its feet. The smell
of earth and wind
that clings for years
after soap and water.
The green corn odor
of my hands.

Thinking with Me

Thinking with me
the river like a long
slow swim. The in and
out of stars on water
and the one wind that
comes with storm on
its breath. Damp wind
heavy with its dark
odor. Odor of bark and
soil and fur and stars.
Thinking with me
the sloshing water and
my swimming arms. And
the moon in and out of
thick clouds until the
skies crack with their
thinking, break in their
white thought, jagged
and ragged and sudden.
My face arises from the
slick of dark water as
if the world has thought
of me so intensely that
I form in the dark. Here
swimming and wondering
of the world. We meet in
one quick thought. Then
dark again and separate
as rain.

If You Do Not

If you do not love
me, my bones will
hold me up. The
lilacs will go on
purpling and clustering.
Sunlight filling the
windows with gold
in the morning, amber
in the afternoon.
If you do not love
me, my flesh will still
take the wetness of
the rain. The winter
wind still leave its
teeth dangling from
the eaves of houses.
The sparrows dot and dash
their morse code. This
moon turn bubble and sickle
and shard, as the earth
circles and circles again.
What will happen you will
not see. The bleaching
of the world to a dull, dull
muslin. The loss of joy in
the berry and orange, in
the apple. The spark that
flashed in the network of
nerves and veins will flicker
sadder and sadder, burn softer
and slower, sadder and softer.
My tongue know only the taste
of charcoal, of sulphur.

Dark Addiction

Dark addiction
to the trees. To
their various leaves
and songs, to their
knots and bends.
To their straight support.
They are to lean the
mind upon in the flat
prairies that pull
at our bodies trying
to suck us away.
Just as my grandmother
grabbed a tree in a
tornado and saved herself
from being broken open
in the fields, so I cling
to them. Admire how
in such affliction
from wind and weather,
sparsity, cold, they
can persevere. Persevere
when the corn stalks splinter
off and barns topple.
When the strongest men
pack up and leave this land.
These trees, gnarled and
twisted, stunted and hunchbacked,
if they could, I do not think
they'd go.

No One Explains

No one explains the
way of a grey barn.
The motion of it
when we are all
away. When we are
not looking. What
it does with the
wind in its eaves.
Or how it responds to
cold April rain.
What its sound is
when the sky is
black and moving
in the shape of a
funnel, throwing
all its birds up.
What its serenity is
when the moon lays
on its roof like a
white lantern. How
it feels when the nails
rust and are too small
for those enlarging
nail holes. And the
boards that warp and
sag in like an old man's
body sags in.

Flour

In this sun
there is only flour.
Flour of wind-ground
roads. Flour of
sun-baked barns.
Flour of thistle.
Pockets fill with
flour, dust-colored
flour coats everything.
Down the long
deserted road,
kicking through
the dust of beaten soil,
a film collects upon
the face of flour.
Texture of thicker
flour ground from
corn and the taste of
earth flour on the tongue.
The wind, of course, is
the pestle always
against us. And grinding
in the fields to the left
the hard white flour
of cow bones, the rusty-colored
flour of a wheel.

Doped with the Dust

Doped with the dust
and the sun,
the musky smell
of pumpkins, gourds.
This morning the
sun slashed with razor-sharp
arms at my rear-view
mirror and the cold
globe, like new-picked
fruit, stayed in the
sky before me out of my reach.
The moon. My mind, sluggish
with morning and chilly
autumn, believed
for a while in two worlds.
The ripe and the unripe
in the sky together,
uncontradictory.

Tent Caterpillars

Huge in the huge
green bundles
of cottonwood leaves,
grey bags of silk
inhale, exhale,
in the hours of fall.
Silk that suddenly
glimmers grey
in gusts of hardening
October. Silk and
a sigh. The caterpillars
ride inside and slumber
while the green leaves
stiffen to gold at the
base of a hard blue sky.
The lung bags breathe
and breathe with all the
power of the breath
of trees while caterpillars
dream of being moths.
The dense silk sacks opening
to the stuff of wings.

October

You can't live
hard enough
when October comes.
Its red, brown
burn of leaves.
Its live hot
coal of moon.
The dark and its
damp breath
inside your clothes.
The way the fields,
shriven of corn,
pull you into
their gothic, misty
light. You never
believed so hard
in gourds, in apples.
How complete they
turn in their ripeness.
The ripening chill of
dusk making the bones
in your arms and legs
stronger, straighter.
In the colored afternoons
a hundred shades of light
fall in your hair. For
every October morning
there are at least a
hundred ways to live.
And again and again
you will choose one.

Swollen Sun

Swollen sun,
heavy in the branches.
Even those geese,
above in a thickening
autumn sky have
plump wings.
Everything's full.
Trees so ripe,
so fat with all
their last leaves on,
swell. Their golds
and reds so heavy
I sink down weary
on a tree stump just
watching everything
ripen, everything grow
fatter for winter.
The moon too is bloated
after pasturing all
night in the corn.
Plump and luminous
behind the haystacks.
Drifting across the sky
after lingering over
the black apples, the
blacker plums. I have
not prepared for this.
Am amazed by all the
feasting of the moon
and sun. And the wind
nibbling steadily at
the last gorged leaves
of cottonwood, oak.

So Badly Nibbled at

So badly nibbled at
the trees are tatters
and rags. Still between
what is left of their leaves,
pure blue winter skies.
And at night the hard
jewels of stars set in
the branches. In the
daylight you can see the
birds glide farther, see
better the tone of the colors:
grey, sharp pink, pale yellow
passing up and down on the
horizon into blue at dusk.
Now you can see better what
is beyond ornate disguise.
The skeleton structure. The
space. How much room exists
for things to reach up to,
push into. How much there is
to recreate. The wind setting
before you, as always, a clean
blank page. The original face
of snow.

From Here They Are Headless

From here they are headless.
Five birds on a wire.
The wind making them
what they are, all folded wings.
Feathers suddenly hardened
become the same dark color,
the same rough texture of
the bark of nearby trees.

Nothing in the Fields

Nothing in the fields,
nothing. Open and white
and on and on. Little
trees with their
branches frozen up
and a bird maybe after
a long time. Until now
all over shapes and
shapes moving. Horses.
As if out of the thaw
they have sprung from
the drifts of snow
and they move
from shape to shape
and carry on their
bare backs, spring.
All brown with
shaggy winter coats
nostrilling thawed air.
The fields crawling
with shapes of spring
and raw.

As It Softly Always Will

As it softly always will
the cardinal comes
to the feeder this morning.
Comes for seed and
the way of sunlight. For
the hush of morning
grasses without footsteps.
For the silence of dew.
How he quiets himself,
steadies the red speed
of his wings. Leans closer
to me and listens. I can
hear it too. The thin needles
of sunlight threading in
the grasses. A breeze pulling
each blade up and over.
The sealed lips of roses
opening petal on petal.

Hearing the Snow Geese

In the luminous
night, with the white
shadows of our
breaths hanging
close to our faces,
we stop for a
moment not breathing,
hearing the snow
geese heavily winging
their cumbrous bodies
overhead. We are all
a part of the dark.
How hard their voices
sound in the thick
night air. And how
difficult it is, after
listening, to walk
quickly anywhere.

Owl

Do not put any
word before
this voice nor
any word long
after. I want
to hear without
even the sound
of my breathing
the complete note,
round as a sphere,
round as a plum
or an apple, the
name he keeps sinking
into the bark of
the trees. Pounding
into the soft of
the cottonwoods. I
want to hear the
name of owl before
it is sunk again like
a drop of resin inside
the rings of the trees.
I will not use his power.
I shall not repeat what
I hear.

Susan Strayer Deal was born in 1948 in Lincoln, Nebraska. She received her B.A. in 1973 from Kearney State College and her M.A. from the University of Nebraska-Lincoln in 1980. She taught English in junior high school for four years in Nebraska, and presently teaches English and creative writing at St. Ambrose College and Augustana College in Iowa and Illinois. She and her chiropractor husband Steve currently reside in Davenport, Iowa, with four cats, but still consider themselves Nebraskans. Her work has appeared in numerous journals and several anthologies. ***No Moving Parts****, her first collection of poems, was published by Ahsahta Press in 1980.*

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