

BARRY DEMPSTER

## SECRET

There is a secret to happiness, he swears—  
wanting it above all else. That means  
5 am, first in line, gummy, greedy eyes.  
That means knowing what I want. All the  
usuals—jaguars and windfalls and a lust  
so sharp it pierces drops of sweat and strings them  
into pearls. Apparently, the world  
is abundant, one big Santa sack.  
It's there for the taking. But me and my  
misery don't like to be apart, don't trust  
the Pollyanna gusto. Sad feels safe  
like a gun in a bedside drawer. All that loss  
I never really lost, the pain I stored.  
Battered heart soaking in a glass, sleep  
so close to death no one can tell the difference.  
Give all this up for happiness? The secret  
is to simply close my bloodshot eyes  
and see myself cartooned into smiles  
where my arms and legs are extra lips. Here  
I am overjoyed behind a silver  
steering wheel, giddy as a glint. Oh,  
to love my life. There is a secret,  
he repeats—the universe is on your side.  
I picture God spilling his seams like  
a genie on speed. Nothing to do but need  
and receive, the new communion.