

JOHN WALL BARGER

THE UNSPOKEN WORD

While we talk a blue streak at a café,
an unspoken word
drifts in the air between us
like a bit of ash.

We do not speak it
yet it grows,
somersaulting in the air
like tortellini
boiling in a pot.

Like a hummingbird egg.

Then it *cracks*.

On its own, unspoken, midair,
it cracks,

hatches, all mouth,
inhaling

like a plastic bag
in the sea. It *speaks*, inaudibly,
mouthing words.

We (still talking) lean in
to hear. It falls
flat, crawls the tiles,
sheds its skin.

Bare, veined
like a jellyfish,
slimy organ of a bird
left at the door,

it crawls up the skirt
of an old woman
chatting to her friend.

Its one eye—
upon the wrinkled cheek
of the woman
—blazing, it crawls
into her mouth.
She stops chatting.
She drools cappuccino.
She croaks
at us!
as if cursing: “*Love.*”

MORNING AFTER A PARTY IN A FARM- HOUSE

Downstairs, friends gobble pancakes
in a hangover mania,
while I lie on a hard bed
scanning my body
for joy I can use like pliers
to pry my way into the morning,
& it came back to me:
last night I sat with an old friend
on a firewood pile
as she described
the fingers of her childhood
piano teacher, how as he played
with his left hand deftly
his right dragged down her thigh
up her school skirt
& down again, up & down
like waves on a shore.
Listening to her
I had on a silly orange wig
I couldn't figure out
how to take off.
Now on the hard bed
the house tomcat sits on my chest
gazing out the window
at the wheat field
like King David at Jerusalem.
Each night he returns from the brook
smeared in blood, in his mouth
one of night's creatures,
demystified. My dream ignites
like a flare in the dark:
I was naked like one of the dead
catapulted out of the earth.
Like a demon back from war.

Nothing *happened*.

I just stood in a forest

breathing. Effect of a vanished

cause. So the light

I gave off was my own.