How to avoid being killed by my father

Before we can know the words we hear,  
We can read the language of bodies.

The wrinkles in the brow and eyes,  
the lifting of the cheeks and  
sinking of the shoulders.

Before we understand words,  
We understand the pitch and volume of footsteps.

My brother knows a light walk  
is more dangerous than  
loud vibrating steps.  
You can hear him coming.

If there is no sound,  
if the television is off,  
and the lights are not on,  
turn off your light.

If he looks at the ground  
in the way the tongue of the clock rocks  
then go straight to your room.  
Even if you have to fake sleep,  
and even if you have to pee,  
hold it till morning  
or just wet the sheets.  
Mother will clean them tomorrow.

If it is Sunday morning and he is home,  
stay in your room and play with the train sets  
and action figures. Mother will bring you lunch.

If he comes home and wants the television,  
just let him have it, my brother says.  
and don’t eat the rest of the nougat,  
it is his favorite and he only gets it  
mailed special to him at Christmas.