

HOW IT BEGINS

My mother watched me
make papier-mâché worlds
from newspaper strips

soaked in flour and water
wrapped around
an inflated balloon

dried, hardened,
a melon-sized oval
the texture

of a hornets' nest.
Already stung by the hornets
infesting the center of the world,

my mother
smoked cigarettes
looking out the kitchen window.

I rubbed the wet brush
on the button-shaped colors
painting over the flaky

headlines and newsprint
in my version
of the world's colors and shapes:

square house,
stick figure family,
my mother expressionless with

the two black dot eyes
and flat red mouth
I could manage at six.

Rather than look at my world
she stared out the window
at her own that she fled at six

(how could I even
comprehend it) Poland,
Brest Litovsk, 1933

local workshirt
thugs with clubs
widening paths

for the coming Nazis
who carried off
her mutilated grandparents

aunts, uncles, cousins
to feed the larvae
of the master race.

Today, in America, face-masked ICE is kicking in
grandparents' doors, rounding up
factory workers from the auto plant,

farm workers from the harvest,
students as they leave
apartments or compact cars

to hurry to class, and stuffing them in
complicit prisons. National
Guard troops

with automatic weapons
infest cities like locusts
in green and beige fatigues.

Scared children peek from windows.
Husbands and wives
whisper into the night.

No one sleeps.
This is how it begins
I imagine my mother saying

even though she hardly ever speaks,
cigarette smoke forming
grey curtain over white curtain.

I remember sometimes
I would crush
the papier-mâché —

ripping and squeezing
shards as if from a hollow
hatched egg.

Someone is always
tearing the world apart
with nothing but malevolent bare hands.