Always the endings and the rhythms

rhymes and the rages rain all night must be thunder the thump of wounds

Around you all our children

thrumming It's you who haunts the mornings.

Who is this self up with the washing-through the rinse many dirty dishes to keep me from sleep. The adolescence of loss left to

those infuriated devices Remember when you said I was present like a hummingbird.

Here but in flight.

I've been

the bird of absence the home in dissonance promises and hurried kisses

Try to predict the detritus My tracing through Your poetic whispers of absence and presence And

remembering again through the skin and

spectral repetitions of the voice of the mother. I am at school and There's talk of a prowler.

always the prowling. Every small town seems to have a prowler. Too hot I sleep on the trampoline under the Mallee arc of stars but before dawn I'm running in because I hear the footfalls. In the schoolyard the taunt ends with something

half swallowed

*Your father is the prowler.* 

What?

Nothing.

You're not meant to tell her.

What?

Your father. He's the prowler.

No. My father, he's the butcher. A gentle, loving man.

He's the prowler. Everyone knows.

Fifteen years ago, he got

arrested. For being a prowler. In another town. He was the butcher there. And the prowler.

At home, my mother. At the

sink. Tired eyes. Dad is at work. At the butchery. He starts before dawn every morning and comes home long after dark. Coats and aprons over his arm, left in the laundry out the back Where the litter of kittens curl up in rags under the old sink. Meat-stained work clothes for washing and pegging out on the line.

*Mum, what's this I heard at school.* Dad. That other town where he worked at the meatworks. Prowler.

Arrested.

Her mouth falls open. It both terrifies and impresses me, that way she has of showing emotion in her face. In many ways, she is very good at hiding but shock

marks her like open wounds to her face every time And she is a woman who has suffered many shocks in her lifetime Many cut-open wounds Openings-up

Who said that?
They really said that to you? At school? Today?

And she tells. Tells a story it looks like she has tried

to forget but

it lives inside her like a dream that just doesn't seem to dissipate no matter how bright the light.

The police banging at her door. She has me, an infant, in her arms. And a toddler waking up in the back room. She's sleepy, always hard for her to find her way out of her deep, deep sleeps.

She doesn't understand.

They keep asking for him. Saying his name. Again and again. Asking where he is. But it's in the night she is inside this deep sleep confusion He's not there. Of course he's not He works nights. They slaughter by day and the butchers work in the night Making the cuts. But she can't quite remember that Only that he's not here Not in the house His side of the bed empty and they keep saying his name and of course she knows the name, he's her husband Of

course he lives here. Why can't she say, he's at work.

She cries says he's not here, can't remember where he is They shout

Think she is hiding something. Is he often missing

when you wake at night, they say And of course he is.

He works

nights. He's the prowler they shout at her. You

must know.

You're protecting him.

And my mother, you see, my mother

with all her shock and her open wounds, words like that scare her They really scare her. Prowlers scare her. But not as much as the suggestion that her husband is a prowler.

They leave at last. She's got out the words that he's at work. *He's at the meatworks* 

she says

I'm screaming in her arms. Her baby is screaming in her arms.

She shuts the door on them and puts me in the bassinet and shuts the door on me too. And sits in the kitchen in her dressing gown with her coffee. And waits for the morning light.

His name is Robert.

He's a butcher at the meatworks.

He is tall and thin.

Another butcher at the meatworks is also named Robert. He's also tall and thin.

That butcher Robert is the prowler.

Not her husband. Not my father.

The other butcher Robert, the prowler, is

arrested that night. At some point soon afterwards he is not only charged with offences relating to the prowling

but also with a series of rapes.

He goes to jail. The other Robert goes to jail.

My father continues to work through the nights. My mother sleeps her deep sleeps. But,

fifteen years later,

I am at school and they are still saying my father is the

prowler.

It's a new decade. A different town. I'm an adolescent, not a baby in a cream wool blanket in a bassinet. But this accusation sticks to my skin now.

And I go back to the schoolground and tell them the real

story

but nobody is listening.

And I ask my father why that is, and he laughs. He's strong. Unlike me, he's sure of who he is, and so I watch his face shadow over as he continues to smile. He can try this on for a moment. He can be the prowler. Because he's so sure that he's not.

I wish I had that as well as his dark eyes. I don't think I'm ever sure that I'm not

the prowler

thief night stalker

We,

you and I

are

alike in this way among others

Always meaning to fall asleep earlier the wind that sounds itself after midnight.

but intoxicated by