

Diorama

First, the remains of foil balloons littering the bank of the pond,
a string once tied to a child's wrist. Then, a pilot in uniform,

perhaps on leave, stepping quietly past the jungle gym and benches,
with his lover arm in arm. This is not a photograph, not a map. It isn't

landscape I'm after, but the way the pieces move, why a bomb
his father's squadron dropped in a field forty years ago, never cleared,

today undoes a farmer's face, returning it to carbon, iron, and air.
When the neighborhood I once mistook for home is placed in context

and stands revealed as hostile, the freeway south crowded with ghosts
of homes its engineers designed it to destroy, and when my child asks

what the letters stitched into my socks are spelling, as he runs his fingers
over each, and is rewarded with a brand name, the number of miles I pack

between the neighborhood and me turns trivial. I carry its history
inside me like a flu, exhale it every place I might escape to. I'm sorry,

but I have to build it, to construct the quiet of this park in summer, so you
can see it as construction. I have to call back every crumpled newspaper

beneath the overpass, and follow the avenue of offices and bars toward
the minor league ballpark, outfield sterile as a hospital floor, the thudding

of fireworks confused for jets or thunder every Friday night. I have to
reduce it all to this shoebox model, if only to understand its scale,

to guide you past the road signs, each bent slightly in a differing direction
by a stray car's bumper, to the one that reads *no outlet*, to the living room

beyond, where the steady creak of pipes, the water seeping, lulls
a man to sleep, and on the TV, tuned to breaking news, an explosion

rips across a darkened skyline, still frame veiled in wisps of smoke.