

AUGUST KLEINZAHLER

Glossolalia All the Way to Buffalo

Poppy is in the storm cellar, cleaning.
Chippie and her little friend Arlene
up top are riding along on the swells
of a joke about the Russian tank-commander,
Colonel Vladimir Khotchokakov.
They are beside themselves, each wave
of laughter gaining force from the one before
until their faces redden for want of breath.

Their laughter is to Poppy as water
falling from a jagged height in broad curtains
to the rocks below. The violent
little spasms, hiccups, retching nearly,
moves the feel from the grotto or bosky glen
to the clangorous, windswept gorge.

—*How like an intoxicant*, thought Poppy
to himself, the way words come loose
of their moorings and fall apart,
little bits of them all over like an airliner wreck
spread out across the phrenologist's chart,

as he pushed aside a cobweb, wall-sized,
something really from the Brothers Grimm,
and found there only a rusted nozzle
and the mummy of, well, a *largish* mouse.

As if the bus at day's end from the plant

back to the suburb turned right
on Marsh Tern Road instead of the straight shot
south to the agapanthus and satellite dish
then made a hard left to a finca near La Paz.

The laughter, sobs and coughs subside.
—*My darling, my little baby girl*, Poppy sighs,
the notion a cool, sun-washed breeze
across the back of his neck, now starting
to simmer with an itch, maybe prickly heat,

when he just then remembers a line
spoken or read in a recent dream, the words
so charged as to be an incantation or charm,
transforming the landscape to nothing but light—
no chairs, no stovepipe, no glue,

nothing but those words, stenciled in air,
sky-written across a creamy expanse,
spoken and written as one:

a cipher, a code, but drab,
weirdly so, like the password of a fraternal order
with its special hats and showcase full of civic honors:

He used to own a bar in Buffalo.