

Instead

'if i decided to stop being a poet
what would i do instead?' i asked
(my husband) the other night

the other night when it was late
it was too late to start cooking dinner
& the cattle dog who lives for order

requires order & feels its lack
like her hackles feel static she was pacing
between us resorting to vocal admonishments

to higher-than-usual-pitched chortling cajoling
someone to get with the program the other night
after gymnastics & martial arts & driving

driving in gridlock on multiple highways
after the shopping wasn't done
after & we were too hungry to cook dinner

after hunger became the side dish of the night
after my husband had worked all day
& beer number three hadn't staved off his hunger

& hunger was a side dish the kids snacked
on chips & played redundant games on their phones
& the floor was unswept the dog was anxious

her nails clicked on the unkempt floor
the cat meowed to be fed the shopping wasn't done
& so a can of tuna was cracked

the cat's bowl was filled & we gave the dog the juice
the dog lapped then she went back to clicking
& minutes ticked another hour

while my fingers ticking on the keyboard
whooped up a frenzy of words on the screen
with hurricane intensity they swirled

they dispelled into wisps against cold fronts
& re-galvanized in isolated updrafts but rained nothing
because meaning always slips drily away from the words

Stephanie L. Harper

& escapes like sly prey into the woods because
the words bravely give chase but they were never cut out for this hunt
& they get lost & hungry

they go hungry like an injured wolf separated from its pack
like a cattle dog lacking order & teenagers not-talking on phones
like groceries that can't shop for themselves

like the cat settling for tuna
well not like that
like clacking keyboards churning up dry storms

like computer screens adrift
at the mercy of tidal waves of hunters
& peckers & especially *delete*-ers

like a poet who can't do anything instead

like the *shift* key & the *alt* key
like the fourth beer needs to be the *ctrl* + *alt* + *delete* keys
like *delete* is a kind of key

they go hungry

like a husband