How to Hear Chicago

Here a spirit must yell
to be heard yet a bullet

need only whisper to make
its point—sometimes I imagine

you right before your death
with an entire city in your ears.

After Words

Even the sidewalk aches. Burnt out street
lights bow down as if ashamed. Somehow

the fat oak on the corner dodged the bullets.
So did the bus-stop bench no one ever sits

on. A child, her mother, both struck
with panic moments after the first pop.

There's something surreal about being
shot at. How the snap of gunfire

pauses you. Then the rush of blood,
like an electric shock, to the brain. Horror

& elation of being alive. Soon crucifixes
& candles will drape this corner

like a hand-me-down blanket. Of course,
no one seen nothing. Only the sound

of lead wedged in a young man's back.
After the neighbors, the cops will
interrogate the liquor store security video across the street. This chore of solving the crime, like trying to piece together a jigsaw puzzle, blank side up.

Busted Lullaby

lull of determined thumps against his head & back again & again
again lull again head thumps & determined his against of & back
back again against thumps of & lull & his head determined again

3 Little Pigs

Me & uncle in a car when a police pulls us over yelling aiming his gun at uncle’s head when second police comes with more sirens & fear & get down on the floor uncle tells me & don’t move & I don’t when the first police pulls uncle out pushes to the street & slugs his head POW! his back CLUNK! when third police arrives & now 2 police aiming 1 police spraying & 1 uncle with fire in his eyes with snot from his nose when at last a police lowers his gun says wait that’s not the guy sorry amigo & they all leave.

Police Dog

it’s all just play to wrap your mouth around a man’s wrist barely break skin to growl tug hold on till the officers arrive only then do things get serious

Night

The air is like gunmetal.
An explosion of music rattles a van’s shell as it waits the stoplight. I cross the street and my breath rises blends into the night like a car alarm.
A man clutches frozen towels and a tip box outside CITGO’s car wash.
His face—scarf-smothered ninja-style as if seeing and breathing were done with
the eyes alone.

The clerk inside looks vulnerable until I spot mounted cameras.

What else—pistol? Baseball bat? Something defensive deadly
tucked under the counter.

I continue home in skin not safe to be at night.

Bones

Your feet are a slow train wreck of cuneiforms & metatarsals fallen off track. Too many overtimes standing, bagging melon & meat frozen peas & six-packs wedged careful against egg cartons loaves of bread tomatoes that piss if touched too hard. At home you stand at the sink full of yesterday's plates sauce-caked pots butter knives tough with peanut butter. Tonight you fall asleep in a chair trying to ignore the 52 bones of your feet each one humming its own pain.
While Late Capitalism


Nightshift

After the rake & shovel, after the sun & dirt, he pulls on his botas, clasps his Durango belt buckle. It's Saturday night & the pearls of his red collared shirt are snapped & ready for the San Louis—restaurant turned discotheque by evening. Two shots of whiskey get things going, twenty-five cent bottles of Old Style buzz the rest of the night. After the chairs & tables are pushed against the wall, the Mexican sextet begins, and the stepping & twirling carves thru the thick of cigarette smoke & musk.

One woman's toes are stuffed like gravel into size-six heels, blemishes concealed by Swap N' Shop stockings. In the dim light she doesn't notice the dirt & scars embedded into the hands that hold her close while she flitters to the music and sweeps the tiled floor dancing fast, then slow, then fast again.