

KEVIN SHAW

## SQUIRRELS

As in *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*, I assumed,  
at first, they were one of us, that the destruction  
which preceded them, I had done, or blamed

on the cat. A chewed cable, the brackish pool  
widening above the closet, the frayed carpet  
next to old and oversized heating vents, all signs

unmade by teeth and piss I had missed. The house  
had been subdivided into student digs, habitable  
because temporary, down the street from the former

London Soap Company, demolished and regreened.  
The bathroom floorboards could be lifted with a rope  
to reveal the stairs into an earthen crawlspace,

as if the builder had dug the house a grave  
for the anonymous landlord who lived some three  
thousand kilometres away in Idaho. The lawn grew

and grew until it fell over on its blades. I wondered  
when the squirrels kept daytime by thumping irregular  
feet, a scattershot clawing, like furred pellets slung

between the rotted rafters fast enough to throw  
an echo and confuse the origins of their sound,  
*Is that what I think it is?* A skeptic's supplication

to the ceiling. As when the neighbour's girlfriend  
came down on weekends from veterinary school  
and I slinked from the shared bedroom wall, redefining

our privacies against that clapboarded lack of sound-  
proofing. The house breached all bounds, let the outside  
in. Late September, the squirrels barrelled down

to the cabinet beneath the sink, pillaged the cache  
of shampoo and Q-Tips. After class, I discovered  
them beneath the fridge and the range. One singed

its tail extinguishing the pilot while another climbed atop  
the bookshelf and chirped at the bewildered cat  
I struggled to keep in while chasing the squirrels

out. The neighbour helped. A wrestler at the university,  
he theorized over beers how his body betrayed  
its indiscriminate excitement—sex, sports, chasing squirrels—

he claimed the flesh doesn't distinguish, and offered one day  
to teach me his holds, the standard pins and stress positions.  
*Is this what I think it is?* The ceiling quietened

at sundown. Though the squirrels made meaningless a belief  
in thresholds, I leaned there that evening to say goodnight,  
hand on oak, the quixotic arbiter of ins and outs.