

MATT SCHUMACHER

DEAR SULCATA TORTOISE

When we pulled over suddenly
and I sprinted to save you
before you crossed the busy highway,
then brought you home in the back of our van,
I had no idea you were destined to attain
a greater weight than mine, and to outlive me.
I didn't know I could fall in love with a bulldozer,
a subsaharan African eating machine.
I didn't know the tortoise eye could mystify,
staring straight from the cretaceous,
that your war helmet would ceaselessly
patrol the yard on stubby legs,
part dinosaur, part toddler, ready to do
combat in your shield, carapace encasing
your back legs like a diaper. I didn't know
the other pets would get out of your way
as if they knew you would one day outgrow them.
I had no idea it could be so positively hypnotic
to assist you as you gorge yourself
on arugula and pumpkin,
to watch you luncheon on tufts
of dandelion and clover,
to see you look up at us
with a face like a child's drawing,
flapping your flipper-like arms when frustrated,
or sighing gently when asleep,
just like a human being.