Bullet went through the ‘o’ in ‘stop!’ so neatly / Took a second for blood to ruin everything / Bullet makes its own bullseye around always / Cop1 melting with grief & Cop2 blows cold air to help him keep his shape / Manuel was often reminded his name had ‘Man’ in it… / In another country Abuela has dropped a bucketful of chilies: ‘Manuel!’ / Raza de bronce, ‘Man’ Manuel, almost whole / Jesus paramedic at work on the living clay / Ruby, garnet, crimson / See the barrio drink up ‘Man’ Manuel.
Bullseye

I’ve always wanted to say I would take a bullet for you, although I’d probably add something like metaphorically, or in your dreams. Speaking of bullets, I’ve never actually seen one, yet here they are, running in a red stream down the page, bullets crisscrossing the night in their restless constellations, their hundred forms of fear. I’ve always wanted to say I could hit a bullseye. But I admire most bulls and I’m sure most cows would miss them terribly. A cownundrum. (Bullets make me slap-happy.) (Not trigger-happy.) Still, I’ve always wanted to say I could shoot like you—but I’m no longer sure how a man shoots. Or why. (A brain-teaser.) (Not a cock-teaser.) Or am I wrong and fear has nothing to do with bullets? What is this red stream but imagination snuffing life at twice the speed of sound?
We played house in her basement. As mother, Ellie crouched behind the plastic oven. As father, I moved to kiss her forehead. She frowned. You’re doing it wrong.

That year, Ellie’s father visited the grocery store where her mother worked. She steered him to the storage room, where he shot her dead, then himself.

We switched. As father, Ellie hoisted a plate over her head, slammed it to the floor. As mother, I poured air from plastic eggs into a red mixing bowl.
We are Bruce and Elsie, we mean you no harm.

We are Bruce and Elsie, we mean you no harm.

We are Bruce and Elsie, we mean you no harm.

We are Bruce and Elsie, we mean you no harm.

We mean you no harm.

We live in Independence, we mean you no harm.

Our weapons are shouldered, we mean you no harm.

We are holding our hands, we mean you no harm.

Our weapons are shouldered, we mean you no harm.

We mean you no harm.

The distant mountains, they mean you no harm.

The dust of the road and desert flora mean you no harm.

The antlers on the wall, they mean you no harm.

The sunlight and stark shadows, they mean you no harm.

We mean you no harm.

The safeties are on, we mean you no harm.

The chambers are empty, we mean you no harm.

The barrels are clean, we mean you no harm.

They’re pointed away, we mean you no harm.

We mean you no harm.

We are enthusiasts and hunters, we mean you no harm.

We are enthusiasts and hunters, we mean you no harm.

We are enthusiasts and hunters, we mean you no harm.

We are enthusiasts and hunters, we mean you no harm.

We mean you no harm. We mean you no harm.
To the Color

Having discovered the old combat boots that I had tried to hide
my toddler strides across the room, feet engulfed in them, he clomps
across the floor; his footfalls call back to other eras, other wars

_When Johnny comes marching home again, hurrah, hurrah_

Fluttering guidons, snapping in the wind, fifes, bugle calls, siren songs

_We’ll give him a hearty welcome then, hurrah, hurrah_

Recruiting slogans, jingoes, jangling of stirrups
Going to whip us some Rebs (or Yanks or...just fill in the blanks...) Helicopter rotors brings the target objective closer
and somewhere in the night, the motifs of wrong or right
are drowned out by the ardor of the battle song: _hurrah, hurrah_—

“That? That?” my kid has caught me in the act of taking my war
photos off the wall. Images from long ago, helicopters, flags,
me standing beside the best friends I ever had
M4s by our sides (am I selfish that I would deny him this kind of life?)

“Gee-tar? Gee-tar?” My little guy, his eyes still full of stars
He thinks our rifles are guitars—I tell him that, in fact, they are
And they make the most beautiful music in the world
The leaves have done their annual death-shimmy. Now the streetlight, with no soft green curtain, cuts a silver blade across my bed & (unless I sleep on the edge) my body. I didn’t want to start with leaves, even though I love how the trees turn the color of my aunts & soul train line to the ground each October. No one wants to hear a poem about fall; much prefer the fallen body, something easy to mourn, a body cut out of the light body lit up with bullets. See how easy it is to bring up bullets?

It’s impossible to ban guns, even from this poem. I lie in the light, body split by light, room too bright for sleep thinking of all the leaf colored bodies, their weekly fall, how their bodies fall & look likes mounds of a tree’s shed skin as if a child could jump into their bodies & play for hours. There I go, talking about our dead, & if you don’t think they are your dead, I’ve run from your hands. They are red like the tree down the street, which looks like a hot air balloon of blood, the leaves dyed fruit punch red, red as child’s red mouth after an afternoon spent on the porch with a bag of Flamin’ Hots watching other kids walk past, waiting for kids who don’t pass anymore on the other side of summer, who maybe go to a different school now or moved or made like a tree & now sleep in a box made from one.
Now Is Not the Time
to Talk About Gun Control

After her honeymoon, Katie returns to work. She makes sure to back her truck into the lot so her Oregunian sticker is visible to us all. Keenan, the new hire, asks where to go in the event of an active shooter. These walls are all windows.

In the team meeting, Katie does not cry when she tells us how, the night they arrived back in the States, her new husband was stupid just the once, blew away his right knee cleaning a loaded gun.

I’m lucky I was home, Katie says. No one asks about the safety, if he checked the chamber after he dropped the magazine. Later, at our desks, winter sun glares across our screens, dares us to look outside. Keenan pulls the blinds. At least we would see them coming, he says. He taps the glass, lowers the shade on Katie’s tailgate, Just Married still soaped on the black paint.