

PTSD

BY BILL GLOSE

He loves these make-believe moments in the morning
when everyone pretends to forget the night before.

His wife, June, in her green dress gathering up papers
before heading into the office. His daughter,

cross-legged in front of the TV, a cartoon sponge
dancing on its plasma screen. Outside in the snow,

the flutelike whistle of an oriole hearkens the coming sun.
Too early and too cold for Janey to wait at the bus stop,

so they squeeze into this shared space like a mouse
pressing beneath a door jamb. For just a moment,

he almost believes that this snapshot, this image
pulled from *Better Homes & Gardens*,

is the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but.
But then he notices that the papers

June is fiddling with need no organizing,
that Janey, still as a cemetery monument,

has resurrected the teddy bear she'd outgrown
years before, and a question slithers

through his torso, through the gaps
between organs, those spaces

without names. The unanswerable *Why?*
whose tail he can never quite grab.

With each tick of the wall clock's metronome
resentment stacks another block

within his throat, a tower that begs
every black thought to climb up and leap out.

Knowing a mind can fracture
into a thousand-piece puzzle

whose seams refuse to snap together again
never stops the picture from shattering,

knowledge buzzing like a mosquito in his head.
Buzz buzz buzz

and then that familiar stab
into a juicy bit of amygdala.

He launches off the couch, screams,
stabs the air, wields the prongs of his blame

like a pitchfork.
When all he loves has emptied

from the house, when the drum of blood
has slowed its cadence to a crawl and silence

rolls over him like a fog, memory will rise
like a zeppelin nosing toward a black clouded bank,

toward everything
he's tried so hard to forget.



Photograph: "Family Matters" by Alexandra de Kempf. "PTSD" was written by Bill Glose for *Rattle's* Ekphrastic Challenge, October 2016, and selected by de Kempf as the Artist's Choice winner.

