WHAT COMES AFTER

The doors of the school are chained and padlocked.

No more children. No afternoons on the slides, no hopscotch squares,

where the air was bright and the children’s sky was joy

arched above to keep them safe. This is what happens after.

The deserted jungle gym, the silent swings.
TELL THEM THEY CAN’T COME BACK

Take them by the hand, 
lead them gently to the door. 
Tell them they can’t come back 
no matter how long they stand 
on the porch and plead. 

The day your mother died 
is out there, its hands filled 
with dried rose petals. The day 
you went to the lake pleads, 

holding a packet of sunlight. 
The day your husband 
said goodbye signals to you 
with an empty palm. 

Tell them all 
that they are gone, reduced 
to faint sparks glimpsed, 
only sometimes, on the dark 
field of your bedroom ceiling.