

The Balloonist

People think it a trick—the town laughing
at the man building a fire over his head.
He has shown them schematics, explained

the science of drift, held fast
to ropes meant to skid out
of a hand. He knows the laws of air

are not perfect. He spent years
watching the basket pitch
to its side. Still, he pumps breath

into the half-expired lung, reviving the dead
space between the sun
and a cornfield, and his failure

is turning somewhat into a party.
The laughter is inflating, twisting
upward, a needle of light

twirling over the patched ground. A woman's hands turn
into sandbags, a man's mouth
sprouts a filled sack. In the balloon:

an echo of noise, a word said
and then unsaid, *progress*, the temporary
flight of a voice escaping

through holes. He is brave,
this man who will look down
to see his children disappearing

into the ragged ends of land.