Wife’s Disaster Manual

By Deborah Paredez

When the forsaken city starts to burn,
   after the men and children have fled,
   stand still, silent as prey, and slowly turn
   back. Behold the curse. Stay and mourn
   the collapsing doorways, the unbroken bread
   in the forsaken city starting to burn.

Don’t flinch. Don’t join in.
   Resist the righteous scurry and instead
   stand still, silent as prey. Slowly turn

your thoughts away from escape: the iron
   gates unlatched, the responsibilities shed.
When the forsaken city starts to burn,

surrender to your calling, show concern
   for those who remain. Come to a dead
   standstill. Silent as prey, slowly turn

into something essential. Learn
   the names of the fallen. Refuse to run ahead
   when the forsaken city starts to burn.
   Stand still and silent. Pray. Return.

Source: Poetry (September 2012)