The Hunchback of Rancho Bernardo

Quasimodo at sixteen

I peel your voice
from the telephone wire
without interrupting it,
spend all summer
collecting cul-de-sacs
like rings, slip each one
carefully over the string
of your words,
each knot of three
or four syllables
punctuated so softly
by pauses & breaths

I can hear if I listen.
Up before dawn,
long before any
cars are out on the road,
I limp through the fog
as a wretch, my calluses
clumsily thumbing the dead ends that hang loosely from my neck,

your tiny French window ablaze with the blue-white flame of the moon—

an amulet warming my skin through my shirt while you sleep behind it.