

Iris

-after Audre Lorde's *Coal*

The indigo between violet and blue,
a setting on the field's table.
There are many kinds of births.
How a bulb sprouts wings.
How a bee gathers pollen from the stamen.

Pollen births honey.
Like a bulb planted upside-down
curling itself around and toward the sun.
There are births wanted and unwanted,
in the middle of a field, under a table,
in whatever corner the queen is forced to squat.

Some births live in her belly,
bubbling like drowning fish. Others grow
beneath her feet, throw her off her heels,
like wild horses tired of their passengers.
Tired of being passengers.

A bulb is another kind of birth:
an iris blossoms into a bouquet.
She is indigo because she is an iris.
Take the pollen from the stamen for your queen.

Our Stone Wall

Froot Loops spatter the table—red orange yellow.
My grandson created the art when he raised his arms,
exclaimed, “Look, Bambi!” as he pointed out the window.

I’m lost in solitude, in this kitchen with my family,
washing the same pans and mixing bowls
over and over again.

My Uncle, too, is lost in solitude. Memory
has betrayed him. The words no longer emerge
in those seven jumbled tiles he once placed strategically.

Did it all start when we buried the dog, the cat,
our childhood loves, by the stone wall
where our home ended and our imaginations began?

My solitude a sapling rooted in a crack of the dilapidated wall.
My uncle’s loneliness: crumbling mortar.
My grandson never knew the dog, the cat.

He misses nothing yet. He runs
out the door, into his yard, his imagination, to find Bambi,
the Froot Loop mess left for us to wipe away.

With My Luck

So many boast their unique propensity
to suffer the worst of all outcomes.
Is anyone that special?

Is there a lily in the field
whose good fortune is less than its neighbors'
even if the shade shines darker upon it?

Life isn't fair, my mother told me
when I was six, or maybe three—
A terrible wonderful truth.

--A tantrum.
--A turning away

to lie on the lawn and watch some ants
march by, lugging their loads
while others seemed to stroll.

So many lilies in the field.
A child wondering in the grass.
An ancient man wandering vacant streets.

Boston

after Joy Harjo's *Juno*

This city is made of bricks, boats, boxes of tea.
The Atlantic to the east, the curling Cape.
The suburbs to the west.
It's always been this way, since 1620,
because pilgrims who were rebels
fleeing and invading claimed this land,
molded it with cobblestones
and puritans.

Once, a well-dressed silversmith
rode through the streets, hollering.
The bells tolled. They still do,
hourly. The dead
 buried beneath their headstones—
which is a world below this world—
watch, judge, murmur about our ignorant
 follies, sins.

I follow my Freedom Trail,
past chic cafes, up Beacon Hill,
toward the gold-domed capital.
In the Gardens I see No-one's native
son, head against the rough damp bark.
Too dark to see who he might be.
He does not open
 his eyes.

I keep staring as I walk, my head
turned back. The grass a muddy carpet.
The swans paddle by without looking.
Should I touch his shoulder—him
at the foot of the tree? Say I'm sorry
for those remarks coming out of Fenway Park,
where our city's hopes and spirits
 rally round?

And I think of all I barely know:
a barber's dealings in a back room in Little Italy,
a naked fisherman scrubbing the wharf's film from his skin,
a forgotten toddler staring at a broken TV,
the plucked-chicken smell of Chinatown sidewalks,
the violent violations of the Combat Zone,
the Irish pubs bursting with
 false glee.

Disclosure

I want to tell you — my body,
how it looks to me,
how much I ate or didn't,
how much I exercised or didn't.
I did not not eat, or eat,
to get your attention.
(I did not want you to notice.)
I needed to eat nothing.
To eat everything.
To get rid of it all in any way possible.
This body is my loneliness,
a shameful secret.
I know you are not supposed to
comment on my body.
But I want to share these fears
which have haunted me for years.
I cannot hold them alone.

I want to admit to you — my drinking,
now that it has stopped,
or I have stopped, or both.
I did not drink
to get your attention.
(I did not want you to notice.)
I drank to be free to be me.
I drank to escape me.
Neither worked.
The drinking was more loneliness,
a shameful secret.
I dare not say how much I drank,
what I did and where and when.
But I need to share these secrets.
I cannot hold them alone.

I want to show you — my scars,
now that they have healed.
I did not place them
to get your attention.
(I did not want you to notice.)
They were for me.
They are for me.
But they are my loneliness,
a shameful secret
I regret and do not regret.
I needed those cuts
those wounds that blood
to say what I could not say.
I need those scars to remember.
I want to share these memories.
I cannot hold them alone.