

Caverna Sagrada

Everything she knows tells her
she has to let it go, the hollow place
where the baby lived, where the
maturing boy struggles, miles away,
with words like *liar* and other thorns.
This boy made out of light--

how did it happen?
who chose to stay with the dark raveling
of his father’s pain—father
who recognized in him the gold
thread in a nightmare. While she
had been an unbearable glare
that showed too clearly the whole loom.
Looming. Life looms
like a wave in slow motion
getting bigger and bigger and you
know what it is going to do to you
without love.

So the boy
knew himself to be the flecks of sun
that rode that wall of water, the only light
his father could see. How could she turn
her back on that?

In the cave of sorrows she sits
with the emptiness, rocking it
like a cradle. Rocking the poem,
trying to get her back adjusted
in the lap of the arm chair. Looking
at a photograph: the baby
glistening in his bath. She had framed it
with a special mat that hid his father
who held him in the tub: Even
in the rage of divorce, she would not
cut them apart.

[stanza break]

Now, she goes to bed curled with an ache,
lacuna in the midst
of a blessed life. Lets herself sag
into it like limp cloth. When she wakes
the thread is taut. She can stitch the poem
over the absence. She thinks of women

in older times whose sons went to war
at twelve, whose daughters married into
another province, disappeared
in a wilderness of world that takes
by force, one way or another. Spinning
in the wee hours, there is never enough thread
to tell these stories, no satisfying way to end
such a poem. You can drown
forever. That poem just stops.

But there is a boy
made out of passion and June sun, given
the gift of choice, not required to make
any trades.

Here he is in his school photo
under a tree on a leafy background.
An excellent swimmer, his features a perfect
blend of both parents, he is not afraid of the dark.

Green Damsel fly

Breaking loose from her mating flight
She settled to the naked log in the fugue
of Rocky Run, where I lay crucified
hands and feet in the eddies.

She faced me, perfectly still
but for the occasional curtsy of wings.
I moved slowly with my camera.
Sun played on the log bright as a dance floor.
It is I who should bow, I told her. She ducked,
clasped harder as the breeze shook her. Yes
it’s just like that for me too, I said. Long
moments

then

she fluttered, settled
nearer, walked
toward me

black eyes distinct
in her emerald head, all of her body, even
the edges of the black velvet wings a radiant

emerald: *You cannot
die, no matter what
pierces you.*

Soon,
she let the air lift her. I don’t know how long
there were two
in their lilting turns
then the sound-filled absence.

Oak Chair

The birds this morning, as if they could sing
about anything. So we unloaded
your mom’s oak china cabinet, carried
from three states away, as she is

finished with it. It was heavy, and I was heavy
but I wiped it perfectly clean, anointed it
with orange oil and bees’ wax. And the wood sang.
This I thought is eternal life. It made me turn

to her older sister’s single dining chair
I had asked for, an orphan long dispersed
from its fellows. Thin and tall, flowing
like a dancer, its shapely contoured seat made

of a burl—that knot where the wood
has had to struggle, grain all spun
like a storm, fans of blonde curled
among black strands. When I finished

it simply shone, its own poem: *This* it said
is what you are trying to do.
And yes, it is worth it.

Skunks at Twilight

One night when you were a baby,
the four-room house on the sheep farm

a whole family of skunks
crossed at the bottom of the yard.
I watched from up on the porch
white stripes undulating a soundless tide,
mother and five half-grown kits
flowing through the early dark.

I called to your father, you were asleep.
This was thirty years ago, we didn't know
it wouldn't last. Everything
stark with suffering, you a tiny geyser
our bolt of enlightenment. And this
exotic little family stealing along
like the sweetest secret.

I still can't read the sign.
Kundalini, strong attraction
and repulsion, self-respect
says the medicine book. I can say this:

They knew where they were going.
Their flawless rhythm rolls in my mind, it's out there
even when we don't see it, moving like a wave,
arriving. We are born
to this bold errand, sorting out the darkness
weaving in the light while others sleep
amid the breathless watchers.

