

Seven Sisters

Linda sings in her kitchen about
the murdered and missing, songs
written for her indigenous mother.
I warm my hands over the flame
of a candle, listen to the song
of a woman who sees in her
own reflection in a window
an image of her murdered sister.

In the winter sky, the seven Pleiades
are pursued by a hunter, a story
so ancient and widespread
it could have first been told in Africa
when we huddled around the same fires,
before Homo Erectus dispersed
among the continents.

I walk home with mournful songs
in my head. Under the crescent moon
I'm a woman alone, and far from
the light of a friend's kitchen.
I think of sisters and loss.
Of the ways families fall apart, and never
regain their old configurations.

Pictures of Mary, 1983

Gina had a crush on Agnetha from ABBA,
took pictures of her on the television
while her friend stood next to it, posing.

What, Mom? I just want some pictures of Mary.
Her mother didn't know she liked girls.

When the pictures came back
nothing could be seen on the TV screen.
Gina's mother yelled at the waste of film,

ten pictures of the same thing,
Mary next to the television
gazing into the camera.

The Rocking Chair

My husband bought a rocking chair
before he died. *Grandpa's chair*
he called it, long before
any sign of a grandchild.
Now I take a picture of my son rocking
the child his grandfather never met.

One generation brightens
as another fades, the gift
of continuity, the reason to be human
is to suffer, though a handful of days
are nothing but joy.

If the world survives, one day a child
will see this picture and say,
there is my grandfather rocking my father.
Others will see great-grandfathers,
and second great-grandfathers, on and on
down the long chain of grateful, suffering humans.

My son gazes at this child, his feet move
up and down, working the chair,
the pivot connecting all that has passed
with everything still to come.

Mocking

The mockingbird whose song
was a car alarm returned in the spring.
My husband researched the life span
of mockingbirds. Eight years.
He'd wished it shorter,
then the mockingbird outlived him.

His was the loss I was not prepared for.

I feel like I'm going to die.

On purpose? my sons asked,
whose love anchored me to the world,
even against my will.

A mocking bird that sings through
the night does so out of desperation.
Alone in my bedroom
I was conscious of the bird's effort,
the arduous convulsions of the diaphragm
and breast muscles as he sang
the discordant notes of a car alarm
hour after hour, seeking a mate
with a warning of danger.