

## Seagulls

They come from sound and flotsam  
forgotten the way a first kiss is forgot

and found again in a sudden flash of delight,  
bright against a breastbone that has been wrought

into a hard, old thing.

They come down from storm clouds,  
bow into the wind, magnificent and pale

like women who wait along the shore  
for men to return, dragging fin whale

behind them.

They come in twos and fours of pointed wing,  
sing to these lonesome ocean wives,

and soar past the salt drenched wharf.  
They go beyond the sickle moon to live the lives

of sailors who died too soon.

## She Was Lilac

and bold barefooted by the muddy bank  
of thin ice, came to drink in that splendid  
isolation. Her bone-pale youth transcended,  
so he came, cloven hoof & quivering flank.  
The cud of his mouth burned as it sank  
to her honeysuckle skin, scented  
heavy as the alter candles gifted  
by her mother. But she left him manque  
as she darted like gossamer through the glen.  
Oh the game! The game! That uncertain squeeze  
in his lungs by the quake and disease  
of loneliness. She waited, as golden Helen,  
calling for him from the blooms. And again.  
Calling, as naked as the stretch towards heaven.

## South of the Reservation

This house.

This house of mud daubers  
and fried bread. Chicory burning  
on the stove. Cigarettes blooming  
out of a flat tray, like stakes  
in the Llano Estacado, where you were  
from.

This mean old dog tied to the yard  
a yard covered in burs, yellow weeds,  
and the gently swaying laundry.  
He doesn't wish to be touched  
unless there is caution  
unless you know of his bite.  
Then maybe.  
Maybe you can touch him  
a little.

The rain came in bursts of heat.  
Then the sky opened and breathed.  
And it burned these shoulders  
of ours, as we sucked sugar water  
from cheap plastic tubes,  
fluttered in the yard like hummingbirds  
grass clinging to our bare ankles.

## Slugs

They appeared that morning fat, gray,  
and so blissfully unaware  
they were unwanted and, elsewhere,  
in the garden, strawberries swelled

with open wounds and there  
were silver trails that dwelled  
among leaves, like railways.  
You appeared and expelled

the slugs with violent salt. The stray  
one she tried to save hissed a prayer  
from its long body and she stared  
at you, quiet, but her eyes yelled:

They appeared that morning fat, gray,  
and so blissfully unaware!

Jaybird by the Fence

She had seen it through the dawn mist  
folded in adolescent wing  
next to the begonias. Flies swarmed.  
A sorry little thing, too beautiful  
to be wrapped in a plastic sack  
but it moved its head.  
She could not touch it while  
it lived.

By noon, it shuffled into the twist  
of shade. Ants slipped like a shoestring  
around it. It bobbed its head in the warm  
swell of air fixed inside the unusable  
body. What could she do but go back  
to the house, pretend there was nothing dead  
in the garden? Eventually, the heat took it. Mild wind  
kept the stink away.

She hadn't meant for it to suffer.  
She wished she had a brother:  
someone who knew the language of rocks.