

On the Brevity of Everything Golden

One day, I tell myself, I will learn to see
the world through something other than
tears. On the Rialto Bridge in Venice,
the canals are bathing in gold, and I train
my eyes to leak satisfaction.

It is enough to belong for a moment.

How to know this. How to feel this.
How to feel this, knowing
I will never hold a sunrise in my hands.

Maybe home has always been more a way
of wishing, how a band-aid hides an
open wound with something that looks
like a smile.

To the Man in Peru Who Saw Me as Sunlight

There is no right way to spend the summer, but what a waste,
my grandma would say, to squander such a glorious day on
melancholy.

As if sadness were not just another kind of sunlight.

Do flightless birds still ache for the sky, and do they find
a certain beauty, not in the flying but the aching?

On a narrow street in Cajamarca stood a man, leaning against
a bodega doorway with a sweating Coca-Cola, watching me pass
into town. He wiped his brow in the heat, and grinning as if
he knew me, called out and gave me a name. *chica triste*.

Your sadness is glowing.

I wondered if he too found the world beautiful by looking
through the hole in his chest,

and the thought of it filled me with a sudden longing for
home. I spread my wings and stepped out into an afternoon
made of something so bright we almost belonged.

The Devil Doesn't Come to the Flatlands

Tornadoes are a Midwest delicacy. As a child, I used to think the devil sent them here to taunt us. To whisper in our ears that he can find us in the flatlands too. Hurricanes are not his only trick. But we tried so hard to believe we were safe here. We land-locked ourselves and took a rolling pin to all the dangerous lumps in the earth, until the world was bare and vacant for miles. There is a kind of safety in making ourselves desolate. My mother told me all girls must remember this. Iron out all of your prominence—men won't hurt you if you give them nothing to want. After all, she'd say, the devil doesn't come to the flatlands. There is nothing to steal from an empty house.