

Stones

Stones in my pocket pity me,
I who stand in awe of the world.

In the woods, pine trees welcome me,
invite me to touch rough bark.
Smooth stones in my hands leer
or smile depending on the light.

Ahead, the dogs trot not knowing
they are perfect, bidding me hurry,
they move with grace and bliss
as I stumble through barberry.

At home, I savor wine in a glass,
lamb's ear glows in the garden.
Breezes gust through open windows,
the Whip-poor-will softly trills.

There are warm stones in my pocket
fitted against my palm. I hold on.

Imagine

your students line up in rows, answer questions,
laugh at your jokes, hold the door,
bless you when you sneeze.

Imagine how it feels to wonder, "Who has a gun?"
The thought comes unbidden as we play word games,
brows furrowed, determined to succeed.

The question, "What is a baby swan called?"
I love them, yet this warmth is tainted with fear.
A shelf falls in the next room,
and as one we startle – then they fix
their eyes on me, looking for safety.

Swans tuck their young under wings,
but even if I had them, my wings
could not fend off bullets.
When predators approach, the Kildeer flails
its wing, limps, calls loudly, "Follow me."
The chicks hide, soft down blends with grass.

My students play the game – the answer is cygnet.
I imagine a gun in my desk nestled among pencils, stickers, and gum:
I squeeze the trigger, blood explodes, papers scatter, children scream.
My students sit in a row, obedient, compliant,
trusting me, not knowing I do not trust this world.
I have no gun, only my steady heart gripping its fear.

The White Hen

Atilt, a white sailboat tipped askew

the hen propels her bulk.

Claws tear dry leaves, wings raised,

she imagines flight and trundles toward her coop.

The hawk's shadow circles, reptilian eyes

target the soft curve of her neck:

the place where talons sever heads.

She hurries, my hen, July sun on her feathers,

nothing more important than the nesting bin

where there are no predators, only

lovely moon-shaped eggs waiting for her warmth.

I hold my breath, will her to hurry,

and she reaches the coop. I know,

without looking, she has planted herself atop eggs

head first, tail feathers protruding -- a bouquet.

The hawk circles in the sky.

One less death in a world that wears us out,

this hen's victory a small joy to relish.

I return to the house, my own nesting bin.

Somewhere there are lovely moon-shaped eggs.

Embrace

Water embraced me as a child.

Summers I toppled backward off the

pier and into the warm lake

submerged in shallow depths

where seaweed floated over my face.

Small fish nosed my legs

as I invaded their territory.

My feet pressed into soft sand

ridged by the waves, and

the smell of fish floated above

lily pads floating lazily under a high sun.

Now, I am landlocked,

perch on chairs, tap out words,

tend to my restless dog,

spark kindling in the stove,

hold my hands to the heat and sigh.

Still, somewhere, a girl splashes in a lake,

water sparkles, bullfrogs croak,

coots dive, and she listens – there –

at the foot of an apple tree,

the mourning dove croons, sweet and slow.

Canada Geese

Canada geese call across a frozen sky.

Black forms traverse the moon's wide face,
clouds float mindlessly across a silver sheen.

I look up from my snow-covered garden --
these cries open my heart.

How would it be to glide in their midst,
flow on currents, be shielded by wings?

To sing in a minor key, alert
my mate, warn my family?

Geese track stars across great lakes,
mountains, farmlands, cities blink away darkness.

They return to nest sites warmed
by spring air, fragrant blossoms, long days.

The honking fades and birds wing away.

I weigh the loss of wild song become memory.

Inside my house a fire burns, a sulky cat prowls.

I balance on ice, take the lead, buffer birds
behind me, eddying, dipping, following the moon.