

Visiting Hours

Let's build a tent of sweaters  
and huddle like bullfrogs.

Come snuggle so close to me  
you can hear my hair  
chaff against your skull.

The sky is a dying violet  
veined in silent oaks.

I leave you my voice  
in nurses' footsteps climbing  
up the white linoleum.  
That and clean socks.

Almostleaves haze about these  
late March branches. They candle  
to green in the last reaches  
of the sunset before winking out.  
Is that what you thought  
your death would look like?

I am still coming home  
to your hanging shirts.

Domestic

Through muscled roots, past black spring  
soil, I buried your old dog.

Her old dog, you would say, watching him  
search the house for her, hopeful,

her clothes still in the closet, hair still  
in the brush. You still slept then

in linens embroidered in tight stitches,  
her initials rising like scars. Now pale

ovals and rectangles hang where her  
pictures had, shadows of those

boxed photographs you still avoid.  
This is the season of her

dying. And deep into hard earth that scours  
the shovel, I buried the dog.

Egret

At the end of summer the egret stands  
    where the green reeds blacken  
into deep. White and alone, velvet  
    he greets  
    cranberry vines  
crumpling his gown then smoothing it.  
    His yellow metal eye,  
layered by millions of years, the unbroken  
    clouds of a storm, and all  
    the weight that keeps You  
from me and holds us to the earth.  
Egret tell me you've met a god  
    so reckless that he will love  
us all equally.

After Hours

Clever sticks scratch the liver  
spotted lake, the first green  
unraveling. She is left.  
Clouds cross her gaze  
and a few unassembled stars.

How cold it is in this house.  
These inescapable thoughts,  
all that can and cannot be  
healed, how and how long.

It is all still now, her vision  
washed out. A history carved  
in her feet and emptied space.  
All night long the room shifts

to fit the absence. An act  
of god could shake her,  
a tremor in the earth  
of her body and the stretch of

water so black it burns.

Into the Valley

I returned home for this, an Appalachian  
valley where once-green hills hold

the breath of the dead between them and lift  
from each morning a fresh bandage

of mist. I watched the lowering, her coffin  
rocking into the ground, a cradle

swaddled in gravel and dirt. Early fog sank in  
so dense I could tear it like bread.

The gaze of the mourners followed me,  
their eyes black scattering birds.

A fine ice dusted, silently silvered  
my hair into my mother's.

Cupping my hands, I gathered cold globes  
of breath, watched them whisper away.

Do the dead hold their mouths in their hands  
like this to know what is left of them?

When I left, I took the valley with me,  
the train slicing the fields, leaving

its stiff suture. She is survived by me.