

## Ophelia in Her Dotage

The first loss,  
a thorn  
of nasal bone,  
comes spiderwebbed  
in a sneeze.  
Astonished,  
she flicks  
it to the grass;  
a crow plucks  
it to adorn  
his nest.

That Thursday,  
an incisor  
slides from place  
with the mechanical ease  
of a track-mounted  
drawer.  
She protests but stops,  
enchanted  
by her new, old voice.  
She can speak Child  
fluently, again.

Soon after,  
gray hairs spiral  
to the shower's floor,  
she thinks of herself  
as a daisy,  
doffing its corolla.  
Dough puffs and browns  
on the tops  
of her hands;  
her bust recedes  
to dates;  
she nips moonshine  
she finds  
cupped in a bruise.  
I'm my own Eden,  
she marvels.

But, then.  
Short on green  
olives, her husband

reaps  
her left big toe,  
garnish  
for his martini.

## Pygmalion's Betrayal

I.

The peony bush was a horticultural hairball, cowering on a twice-discounted sales rack. Pulling it forward, its browned stalks shivered. I dangled it in the air, biting my lower lip. The pot's soil had dried into cracks.

II.

I gashed the ground ten paces outside of my kitchen door, using the bush to dress the wound. Like a transplanted organ, it threatened not to take, self-cannibalizing any bloom. In time, I offered words of assurance, cocktails of worm castings. My new affection was unrequited, but still--I dared to love.

III.

Two Marches ago, it resurrected itself after wintering in the underworld. I'd finally forced it to develop against its will, and the crown glowed a placental red. I watched this alien, waiting as it budded. Within three weeks, its branches had plumped. Green streaked its arms, a band of conquering soldiers. It spit out a trio of blossoms; the lobes soon loosened, unfurled. My head felt wobbly.

IV.

I snipped the three for my pleasure. As blade cleaved flesh, I thought of the lover whose stalks once fattened in my care. His wife will never know how many burrs I suffered in redeeming him--how daunting the original thicket.

V.

A year passed, and we moved houses. I skulked by one afternoon, spying upon my former charge. The redemption was complete. A dozen orbs lobbed skyward--white whorls that could engorge a finger, if you had one to spare. They had the lushness of swan feathers, but the outer rims were ringed in fuchsia. Four branches bowed down in preening self-love.

I called to it but found myself ignored. I pictured the petals parting into eighty-four tongues, guessing the bush would claim to be self-made. It would say: I have my ant-slaves. My water. My sun. All I need. All I've ever needed.

## My Future Parents Meet Each Other

It's 1976, and my father's thirty-one, half a cad,  
flirts with the bathroom faucet--  
"Aren't you the shiny one?"  
He hankers for flight attendants--  
always gets 'em to stuff his pockets  
with Alice in Wonderland bottles  
of booze. These days, he'd be hauled off  
for sex offending,  
or maybe elected to higher office.

He sits towards the back of an auditorium,  
awaiting a speaker and adjusting the plaid  
on his blazer, skin buzzing from last night's stewardess--  
"You really could be the pilot, you know,"  
she purred--  
when my mother creeps in, mulling  
her seat selection.  
She hesitates a beat;  
she's always been the choosy type.  
At twenty-three, she looks a flower--  
pert, compact, an oleander--  
although in reality she's a Catholic cheerleader.

Give it eight seconds more, now four--  
he's dropped his pen. Fitfully, it rolls  
down the aisle--  
tih-ti-tah-tah-ti--  
drawing a line to the lighthouse of her calves.  
It stops, tapping at the heel cup  
of her patent leather pump.  
The part that holds the shoe together.

## The Gods of the Upper Floors

Termites have dispatched  
a wooden beam  
that once bottomed  
the front facade  
of our two-hundred-year-old house,  
advertising sunlight  
to our basement squatters--  
hermetic beings that worship us  
when we blast in to flip  
the circuit breaker  
or to clear the heater's lungs.

They feast upon the drifts our bodies  
shed as snow;  
they jitter as we fight  
in rooms overhead.  
Our thunder displants clouds  
of dust from their sky.

## So I Gave It

Always, I'll recall  
the night your question  
shadowed me:  
a rabble of cicadas beat  
on inbuilt tambourines;  
the air a four-cornered curtain--  
smell of wet velvet, of wet dog, of glue;  
the set of your face--  
eyes open-caved,  
your lips made of sunset--  
awaiting an absolution  
I alone  
could give.



