

Sojourn

What doesn't change pecks
the dark note of wildlife, lives untamed
in spite of domestic appearances:
Mother declines in her blue chair,

the den her sickroom, blinds drawn,
bucket in easy reach.

Can I get you anything?
rhetorical song, endless codas.

I fill her mantle vase, my gift from Spain,
with fresh morning glories,
white foxglove.
What do the dying need?

Presence of the ones who won't leave
as the pail fills, who won't shrink
from crumpled hands over a face,
who still ask and ask and ask.

None of this lights her room.
My movement is detail,
either coming or going.
Her expeditions into pain

The Small World Answers

Woodpecker in the pecan tree rattling bugs,
fogs in muddy flowerbeds behind our house,
weighty crunch of familiar tires pulling onto the gravel drive.

First sip of wine in the evening,
sadness and relief after dark, forgiveness swirled
on the tongue as sweetened cream.

Smell of rain rising off hot concrete,
old sheets when we return from a trip, my love's
mouth just opening to mine.

The dead still ask to hear us speak,
those not yet here sing their own
lovely sounds in our sleep.

Sky clouded or clear, moving or still, was never mine but I watch it,
July sunlight toasting every stranger I may come to love,
seasons of heat certain as change.

Nothing is mine except basking in the rollick of tall grass
darkened by rolling shade,
not even her mouth, my loss, our fear.

High Season

Welcome to the season
of prey and glide,
wingspread and horizon.

I open my shutters to the first stars
between dusky saddlebags
dropping day into night,

a sky darkening itself into a dream sky,
a moon spotlighting the café of friends
crowded around a patio table.

When another person arrives
we pull up a chair, make room
for his glass, ask for his story

from beginning to end. We cross the line
between knowing and knowing more
we may not remember.

All we've forgotten seeps deep in our skin,
layers our leathering bodies,
cells ripe with intent.

Even when we're old with desire
to rest, the night floats above us
until we swear we can hear: *pull up a chair*

City Wall

On top of the city wall
I sit smoking, legs dangling
over the stone edge: if my shoes
had eyes, I would be falling.
Clouds fog around me,
breaking open for a vision

of the inky river necklace
surrounded by the sidewalk
chain, its crumbling path
tripping those who look up.
Only babies in carriages are safe
to see the sky, and I,

who climbed each step intent
to find what's hidden
from ground view. Hawks
glide above my hazy smoke
rising toward the sun, then swoop
in arcs more precise
than any language could ever be.

The heavens part for a breath:
light on treetops and shadows below,
loud hum of wind, cool
in my ears, fills my head
with human quiet
far from arguments,
traffic horns, cries
of machinery at work.

When the sun nears the horizon
in a violet swath, I do not fall
to the ground overwhelmed.
The sky gives me back my own
breath. I hear *yes, yes* in the air,
my dark eyes turn blue—
ample for me to balance
my refuge in this view.

Roosters

Nothing helps a collard.
Not even Mama Lesters' rolls
covered in flour dust,
the green juice soaking
soft edges of browned dough.
As the sun went down
I kicked the screen door
open to be with my people:
birds, hens, roosters, bugs.
I understood the roosters—
we dreamed out of the same
eye. Roosters could get
anything they wanted.
For five years I wanted
to go home, but when my father
pulled into the gravel drive
as the orange sun deepened
to purple, he held my
older sister's hand
to take her, not me, again.
I was too much.

When Mama Lester's daughter
married that summer,
she asked me
to be her flower girl.
The bride chose me.
In my organza dress,
flowers in my hair,
I believed my father would
hold out his hands, catch
my eye, pick me
up in his arms
whispers *come home*.