

Nurse

On quiet nights in the ward  
she wonders softly if she is a ghost,  
the way men pass through her.

In the pale light of those echoing halls,  
she recalls former husbands,  
their debts scattered

like garments in corners of her  
home. A heart monitor's  
raised excitement from a girl's room:

a reminder of her youngest daughter,  
the one she loves the least.  
She checks the sleeping girl,

places two fingers on her white  
neck. The beeping slows.  
A patient's cough

from a room down the hall.  
A family sleeping in the waiting room. The echoes  
of a man's heavy steps from a corridor she cannot see

crescendo then recede, and in that white silence,  
she wonders why she cannot put her finger  
on the thing she does not understand about love.

Brother

*“To cast out the horror that has a name and a face you must give it another name and another face.”*

-from Chris Marker's *Sans Soleil*

Even when you faced it in front of us in the living room, you only looked with one eye. You were a giraffe in a sparse field. You were a poacher with a big gun. You pulled the trigger, and your shirt filled with blood.

You kissed him in the back seat after dropping your girlfriend off at home. You turned the rear view mirror away so no one could see you. With your eyes closed, his tongue tasted like blood. You left your rifle at home, but it's still loaded.

You come home at night, when it is too dark to see yourself hiding in mirrors. There is a poacher at the top of the stairs loading his rifle. The sight has already found your heart. He pulls the trigger, and the carpet fills with blood.

There are only so many places a giraffe can go without being seen. If the sun falls upon speckled body, then the gunman is close at hand. You raise your head from the brush, and find yourself staring down a barrel. You are in an easy chair avoiding eye contact.

With wrinkled brows, we sit in an arc around you. I am a painting on the wall, “Flaming June,” which is said to symbolize the fragile link between sleep and death. I am curled in an orange dress upon a bed of my own hair. You open your mouth to speak. Nothing can make it up your neck.

## Spring

We both knew the poppies would not last forever.  
Like the hawk, dead among the flowers' stalks,  
shrouded in crimson and little black dots,  
their petals will wilt and meld again with the ground.

\*

Today lasted forever, someone said  
after finishing their cognac a block away from us  
while you said nothing (hadn't said anything)  
sitting at the top of the stairs overlooking Trastevere.

\*

The poppies didn't matter because  
they were in Pompei, and so was the bird,  
which wasn't a hawk, was it? A duck?  
A pigeon? A crow sitting on the wires  
above my 11th Avenue home  
months later?

\*

I lost track of how long I watched them,  
hoping their petals would not wilt  
as they wilted, before noticing the bird:  
first its plumage,  
then its stench.

\*

It seems unreasonable, wanting to call this late  
at night after what seems forever  
simply to say that, today in Cowen Park,  
I saw a clump of poppies and someone  
I thought I recognized, but did not.

\*

At night, I wake to sounds of birds  
rustling in the brush beneath my window,

perhaps in their sleep, their wings gently bending  
the branches around them as they shift  
to find a comfortable spot among the brambles.