

## The Parrot in the Kitchen

You might not notice it  
looming over the stovetop  
among stainless-steel knives and spice-filled glass,  
older than any other thing in sight:  
a vintage John Wright cast-iron parrot  
perched in shadow on a pedestal.  
The children called him Paul.

Grasp him as they did in the kitchen of their childhood.  
He is always dressed in black,  
his once brilliant colors vanished before you were born.  
He is ponderous iron you can hold, a fulcrum you can lift  
to pivot on crown-sealed bottle caps.  
Magnets stick to him like half-remembered dreams  
twelve steps to sobriety.  
Will his sharp curved bill  
open you and pour you out?  
Will he turn you like a church key  
to admit your powerlessness?

Now squint hard into Paul's unseeing eye.  
Search his crescent moon-turned mouth.  
Stroke the downward sweep of wings  
that followed you across a continent  
yet will never fly.  
Feel his broken crown.

## Banana

I know little of your history.  
But I can hear the fierce chop of a machete  
as you fall to the floor of your tropical plantation.  
I can only imagine your long journey by sea and land  
to Seattle and my kitchen.

The ancients called you “music of the wise.”  
Your modern name is music to my ears--  
soft and sweet, like a ukulele lullaby,  
playing on the quiet strings within you.  
Your skin is pliable, curvilinear, sculpted in form  
like a dolphin arched in flight, bright yellow  
before it turns to brown and blackens with decay.

Now with my keenest paring knife,  
I carefully slice your far-flung, close-wrapped gift.  
Your peel descends gradually as three loose tongues.  
They can't stop talking about your tender ripeness.  
They can't say enough about your silky aroma.  
Then I carve you into tiny wheels with owl-like eyes  
and eat them with my oatmeal.

Day after day, my life feeds on yours.  
Week after week, I return to your aisle.  
Like grace, you are abundant  
and your shelf life is short.

## Lavina

We knew her as Mrs. Wright, a widow in her seventies.  
She knew us as her newlywed neighbors  
renting the apartment next door for the summer.

For longer than she liked we didn't talk  
except to pay the toll of a hello  
on the way to the bus each morning  
and a how-do-you-do every afternoon.

We found her always among her roses,  
digging around them, pulling weeds,  
careless of Baltimore's infernal humidity  
and her lily-white skin.

The dam of silence burst the day  
she told us her name:  
"Lavina. My mother told me  
it's a Cherokee name that means  
'to love to live by the water.'  
Would you like to see my garden?"

The birds, God bless'em,  
we can't live without them  
but they sure are a nuisance sometimes  
when it comes to roses.

I don't know whether you believe in the Lord.  
I do. My husband passed not long ago.  
I knew it would be soon  
after they took him to that terrible hospital.  
You know he acted up so.

I remember the last time he was home.  
It was hot like today.  
He cut the lawn with the lawnmower ten times.  
I said to him, 'Honey,  
you know I wouldn't go cutting the lawn like that anymore.  
It is so hot, you'll get sick.  
Come over here and have a glass of ice tea.'

It was our fiftieth anniversary.  
All our guests were just to come.  
I'll have to show you the table  
I built for the occasion."

## End of Summer

1

Among red zinnias  
Spike, our Himalayan, squats.  
The cat purrs, content.

2

The Himalayan  
sleeps now. Hummingbirds hover.  
Spike dreams, I imagine.

3

Dad framed these lawn chairs.  
They are Gibson Islanders,  
not Adirondacks.

4

A strange black cat now  
occupies the birdbath, idling  
curiosity.

5

Our dryer's defunct.  
That is why seven blue towels  
hang on the clothesline.

6

Red squirrels forage.  
Acorns fall from the high oaks  
intermittently.

7

Dreams dim. Spike awakes.  
The strange black cat's eye twinkles.  
A dozen wrens preen.

8

A boy approaches,  
eating a golden apple,  
throwing it away.

9

We behold the sky.  
All this time clouds have gathered  
sublime momentum.