

The Resort

My son found a condom under his bed.
The carpet was stained, and the shower leaked
in the room they gave my daughter and her friend.

We told the receptionist, who made the mistake
of asking, how was our stay,
about the acai bowl that looked more like

soupy pond water than anything edible,
bananas floating like white leaves on its murky purple surface,
not even cool by the time it reached our table.

We told her about the long wait for lunch and
the too-high cost of the shuttle,
which given the price of this place

should really be free. She
listened and wrote down what we said
on a pad of paper.

I added that there were some good things, too,
like the infinity pool, and Stacy
the dinner server, who touched our shoulders

as she passed behind our chairs, and told us she is
happier now that she is not a case manager in New Mexico
anymore. All I see, though, now, in my memory's eye

are those rocks—jagged and soaring
orange spires singing into sky—
fingers pointing, ancient gods at rest, but watching,

vigilant as moonlight, transcending judgment, time,
language, kindness, trust, all of this, us, all of this, forever
and ever, amen.

Garden of the Gods

Spires of orange-colored rock,
with clouds' gray shadows sliding across
the long, pocked faces,
multi-dimensional and brooding
in the sunlight.

Are those really camels kissing? someone asks.
We are laughing with the couple from Arkansas,
retired and traveling, squinting, faces shadowed
by the baseball caps they're wearing.

My son sees a Komodo dragon kissing a guinea pig,
and says so—me, I see the colors and the sky itself,
richly blue and shining,
velvet, silk, but luminous, vast, and hard
to describe so why do it?

A common magpie plucks something dead from the sand—
sand that is rocks ground down over centuries, millennia—
over more time, the nature guide tells us,
than we can imagine. This land got pushed up
like a carpet, he goes on. What was once horizontal
is now vertical, look at those lines.

The land on which we stand is older than anything we know.
Older than imagination, and it's still moving,
but so slowly we would never feel it
or even be able to measure. I don't
understand, but I try to.

What was once sideways,
now stands upright,
singing into the air
like a choir of animals.

Poetry Slam (Burlington, Vermont)

A dark man in rubber boots stands center stage, introducing.
The first, in boots and a lavender tutu, tangles language, says
she does not know who she is alone.
The second raps, and bounces on his toes.
The flannel-clad third sings, discordant,
about his divorced parents.
He wants to crush them like a glass he cannot part with.
A young woman with a headscarf tells
that her history does not begin with slaves.
It was so cold out when we left, our eyelashes froze.
It was so cold.
But my brain felt like a Van Gogh painting,
garish and stellar, messed up,
singing with paint and light.

The Old Aunt

She breathed her last breath
on Commonwealth Ave.
in a green velvet track suit,
a tumbler of scotch
on the bedside table,
careening just before sunset
beyond our seeing
to an afterlife of horses
and green lawns,
lilies, polished silver, birds,
and willow trees,
not to mention swimming pools
and handsome young men
poised to dance,
with Band-Aid-colored hands,
clean cut and decent.

We are the old ones now,
closing accounts, emptying drawers,
sorting through scarves
in cedar-scented closets.
We are the old ones
now, with our rainbow hopes
and baking resentments,
memories, brittle accomplishments.
In time, we will be asking her to speak to us,
inform us how she did this,
especially the last part.
We will listen to her music, learn
her complicated games, startling
over breakfast to glimpse her breezy essence
in our children's dewy, ancient,
mahogany-colored eyes.

Pell

She would come to the house,
and hang her jacket
in the hallway on a hook near the door
to the cellar where there was a playroom
with a blue cement floor

and a plastic bucking bronco named Blaze
who whinnied when you pulled a string.
She would wear a dress that looked like
it was made of paper towels, usually blue,
with sensible shoes.

When my parents left for the evening,
she would go to her coat
and bring out candy bars from the loose brown pocket,
and we would climb the stairs
to sit in the den

with the tweed curtains.
We turn on the black-and-white TV
and my sister and I spin and twirl
to Lawrence Welk
while she claps her hands.

Hindsight is like binoculars
the wrong way round.
My parents were like her children.
We all needed her.
They admit that now.

She would clean our house and sometimes stay
when my parents went away,
when the night fell down
and the windows went dark
as the pupils of eyes.

She loved us well.
Her name was Pell.