

Catching the Baby

My father's birthday, the gypsy approaches,
gold ring poised on her palm, almost impossible
not to look, not to catch the baby, she knows you cannot

let it fall, allow its soft brown head to smack the cobbles,
you cannot stop your hand. Here is a cat dead in a bag,
you glance and pass by, you aren't the kind of person

to touch, to look inside, to bury the bag in the dirt outside
your front door. You are just one of the people who glances,
remembers later to write the orange feet sticking up

out of the plastic bag as dead as anything and you'll return to this cat
again and again, this cat serving as home if you can get there before
the patrol boat pa-pows its slow way up the canal

to your beach. If Jimmy's on board he'll catch the baby
and steal the gold ring. The cat was a runt and the gypsy
sighs back into the doorway of the cathedral, folding

a leg up under her skirt, putting on her hungriest face.
I stumble through cities the way I hug the wall for support
when I'm drunk, I need a description of that, how one flings oneself

at the bannister, then the next solid thing, the window ledge
at the stair landing, then the next, a lover's shoulder, a mother's
shadow. The cat is one of those things in a black week.

In between there are voids the ground solid enough for your feet
but the rest of your body is on its own. You are always reaching for the next
hold-fast, a wall, a bureau, a table. The softness of a lover's hand

is comforting but only the dead are solid enough.
You keep them in jars bolted to the floor moving with you,
just far enough ahead so that you have always a destination.

Copernicus

This is only a single page, Copernicus,
I do not have what you would call a flexible
life I revolve around the sun like you said
my house does not pulse open for any passing

cousin, does not fold itself around the bereaved
no, my house holds us, the few, Copernicus.
We do not know which of us is the sun
we move into and around each other

anemones opening and closing and holding,
digesting what we need which is always.
Copernicus there is starch in my bones
I do not have what you would call a flexible

life there is city in me, boxes piled high
leaning against one another small boats ply
rivers of blood. Copernicus
I long to sunflower turning and turning heliotrope

but I creak in my body I must bring down the heat,
the light. This is only a single page, Copernicus
because we are far from the sun in January
of this murderous year we are spinning

back into the dark when all we can do
is reach and turn. I do not have what you
would call a flexible life, Copernicus.
I revolve around the sun bereaved and holding.

Splendid Angel

I've always wanted to see my mother with bees
in her hair, lifting her, turning her gold, the grammar

of lightness. My mother with ice blue, riding,
a banshee of knees and serpents, my mother

as galaxy, as interplanetary dust, comet-clicking,
deep black empty howling, rain falling through sunlight

in a grove of olive trees. My mother as ocher, as mustard,
as new as the stars, as boat and wind, her flesh to fruit,

bruised pear, secret hidden in an apple,
a splendid angel, a criminal. I would take her into the parlor,

let her see her father, know him in his coffin, shake the dead
from her fingers, from her feet, from her wings.

My Biography

I was born in a moondog a whitewashed
footlocker I was born on Tuesday or Thursday
so they named me twiceover. I was born
to Frances out of Joe out of CoraBelle and Frederick.

I was born in the middle I was born Nagasaki.
I learned about lions. There was nothing about Canadians
in our books. I learned about Bolivian tin and Robert Fulton.
I saw pictures of skeletons piled up in ditches.

I learned yesterday that south of the equator
everything is wrong, the liberators Italians,
the starving prisoners Russian, the water swirls
down the drain whatever direction it can.

I was born preparing for the next war, Helsinki,
Hanoi, Jackson Mississippi. My brother was blind
and went anyway, counting the coins and feathers
that fell to the ground in the English countryside

where a pregnant girl waited with her rapist father
for a way to America. My sister was born with her head
down, her arms folded across her breasts, painted
shame and duty. I was born in moonbow, ribbon

of light over the crab boats, the stencils on my father's
footlocker runic, covert. They named me edge,
the named me outside. I held his hand and his black
eye and knew he would teach me war and love.

August Poem

realizing in my chest
i have no words my throat closes
over the beaks of all the birds
i have swallowed in the night

my hummingbirds stand on a column
of air looking at me
i am the most important display
in their museum of oddities

dusky august comes
cartwheeling down through the ninebark

our orbit quickens around whatever sun
or moon finds our gravity

i can spend sunshine
like coins in the machines of flowers