

1. Strobe

I have come back to visit myself,

to let myself in through the front door
into the hall where stairs turn at the landing
toward their own gloom.

Pillowed light, formal and golden,
settles to my left, to my right, while, up there,
splintered treads lead to places
I can't see.

Enough to pace the lower floor,
down even to the friendly cellar
checkered in worn linoleum,
furnace chugging at its heart,
shrouded platform rocker a familiar ghost.

I brush my hand along the stair rail,
skip the squeaky tread
that always betrayed me;

make my circuit up to the kitchen.
Cabinets sag open:
split weevily riches of oatmeal;
number ten cans spill nails, rivets; bins
unhinged for thirty years.
Out back, the same weedy mimosa
leans a little harder into the porch.

I circle all the way round.
I'm in the hall again, hand
on the knob. A last look.
This has been a good visit.

Past my shoulder the stairs reach up
through shafts of dust motes. Overhead,
a floorboard creaks. Temperature
drops. The chill propels me out;
I jam the front door closed,
test the latch now jittering against
the protest of wood and metal.

A low vibrato on the other side
growls just at the edge of hearing.

I stumble backward for the car.

In the dusk, a beam snaps on,
hungry, roaming the upstairs windows.

Incandescence pierces, pierces, pierces
the shadowy yard.

2. Garden of Earthly Delights

One rogue Scarlet O'Hara peony
determined to be pink.
The irises outflagged by weeds.
Dependent from a sagging pole, the empty feeder, its hummers
lured away by neighbors.
Ivy chokes the turtle-boy fountain dry
and the cracked drain underneath him gapes,
the drain, out of which, last year, a black snake
periscoped for my inspection.
Tangle of wind chimes. Bench,
wrought-iron, bolted together with rust.
Glowing over it all, the magisterial spadix
of the arum lily,
its bloated poison lips.

3. I saw four angels standing at the corners of the earth

Crusted over, the gaudy conch.
Barnacle graffittistas scrawled
their message everywhere.

Underneath, the fine line.

So too
the shell of my mother.
Lipsticked once; now shushed.
Once propped
with cigarette and scotch, the social smile,
the telephone. All the furniture, all the armature.
All the stuff.

So too
the shell of the universe, an egg
cracked open.

Killing time til the last day.

4. Three A. M. Sort of Sonnet

Multilegged, it crawls your pillow toward
the middle of the night. Then is it
your mission to wake? No, but outwit it, but coax it
nearer the neck of the bottle. Forward
it works its way in, monstrous, monstrously hard
to believe. Yet you're the sly one. As, bit by bit,
it pulls in its last segment, you're quick to cork it.
How can you lie there while it spins, inside,
the fascination of horror? Eye clusters like beads.
Each articulation of leg. Each stiff hair.
Tell me this: what impossibly leads
you to ease out the plug? You to give it air?
It's you cannot let it die. It shreds
your hands like rage. It bites your heart like fear.

5. Safety

Slots in a cliffside.
Footholds adzed into a log.
Pulled head-first into the slot,
we might, facing outward,
crouch there, curl there,
sweet grass softening
the smoothed out slot-floor.

Bodies warm each other,
skin on skin. Bodies curl
into each other, curve on curve.
Lights, one, then another,
prick the velvet maw of the outside,
keeping watch as earth stills,
as it cools and stiffens.

The cliff face waits for dawn.
Entwined there, we might look out for
an edge of fire
to lick the rim of the world.