

## MOUNTAIN LION

Nothing human's in that sky,  
like a room where guests aren't welcome  
no radio towers or electric wires,  
and even the planes fly parallel to highway eighty-one  
fifty miles to the west or turn east  
north of here and fly to Richmond.

Just a few hawks circle the blue.  
She eats a bite of the apple she took with her  
and walks the gravel road to the ridge,  
brushes her hair from her face and smiles  
a habit like the sympathy she offers the mountain.  
If she's quiet she'll see the deer in the undergrowth,  
and once she saw a brown bear and cubs.

These hours when there's no one to civilize her,  
to put *her* in the proper perspective  
she often imagines what she might say to the mountain,  
how she'd advise it not to take too personally,  
the dynamite and the quarry,

how she'd point to the example of the bear,  
dung bright with purple berries,  
its misunderstood subjectivity; to the deer's  
flighty point of view; to the scrub pine

that has taken root while she was gone  
all autumn, green needles bright with  
toxins sucked from the wide blue sky.  
But she knows if the mountain could  
it wouldn't offer brilliant arguments  
just lift itself from golden haunches and leap.

## NAVEL ORANGE

Audrey hates to bring in the groceries,  
to struggle in through the side door, arms full  
after the ease of plucking food like costumes  
from a rich wardrobe: crushed velvet of coffee beans,

chains of barley, couscous, wheat-berries, grains  
of edible gold. She harvests from the aisles  
the silks of ruby red chard, of collard greens.  
But then she has to get it all home.

It is— like the friends and lovers  
with whom she once packed her mind,  
their ruffled shadows, satin mysteries  
all there for the choosing—too gorgeous.

No one told her of the difficulties of storage.  
Once home the paper grocery bags, dampened,  
split open, spilling fruit. Ripe cantaloupe  
with its fragrance of sugar and garbage,

the lover with his belly, his suits, his job  
at the financial corporation, a marriage  
that haunted him, and four sweet children.  
The voluminous sugars had to fit

somewhere. Only like the melon  
they didn't. It has taken years to decipher,  
to learn to steadily unpack  
the navel oranges exactly as they sit

on the table, to draw the precise distance  
between the two pieces of citrus,  
how light catches the pebbled flesh,  
the flecks of shadow that fall

into miniscule valleys, the lamplight  
that dazzles one pole of fruit bursting  
with miniature oranges tucked into the globe  
of larger fruit, the midnight that darkens the other.

## BRIDGE

In her dream her son is dead.  
Candy cannot call his name  
as she once did when,  
four, he opened the iron gate

at the park in Paris, careened down the hill  
past the waffle seller and the black swan  
toward the boulevard, cafes, gleaming cars.  
That was before she learned the names

of machines she can now forget: Renault,  
Audi, Toyota Chevrolet, GM, Volvo  
She can forget the spelling rules,  
the multiplication tables, the names

and dates of all the presidents of the USA,  
the names of girls.  
None of them will do any good.  
And then it is morning.

He is twenty-one. Candy doesn't know  
where he is, not exactly  
though certainly he is in America,  
probably in a car, and she—

surrounded by fog rising from the pines trees,  
from the hemlock, from the James river,

from the Shenandoah mountains—  
taking her coffee down to the water  
hears a single engine in the distance.  
One rusty pick-up truck approaches

with farm tags on the gravel road.  
A hand flies up and waves to her  
and moves past her where she stands on the bridge  
in the only location she knows for sure.

## **EXPEDITION**

Audrey shuts the book on Shackleton,  
the photos of his men: playing soccer in snow,  
the Endurance foundered in blocks of ice  
beyond them; gathered around the fire  
on Elephant Island, their weathered faces

lit with wonder as they listen to stories  
waiting for the rescue team;  
petting the stripped tabby cat  
that Shackleton finally shot  
after calling it a weakling.

She would have been the cat  
Audrey thinks worrying about the daughter  
she raised alone, who careens  
on the slick back roads of America  
in her Japanese car. She rises from the couch  
throws aside the weight of quilts  
to choose the spices from the carousel

on the dining room table, soothed by  
the tiny achievement of the small  
wooden spoon in its bowl of salt,  
the four ounce canister of tandoori spice,

glass bottles of whole black peppercorns,  
cinnamon, nutmeg. She stands at the center  
of a rag rug woven into a labyrinth of sienna,  
green and blue, boiling the collard greens,

soy paste and tofu. Her daughter sings hello  
as she arrives, elegant and oblivious  
from the storm, pets the purring tabby  
that sleeps at the head of the table.

## **SATISFACTION**

Not forgetting of course rising from the body that once thrilled you  
with the same delight you now recognize in golden retrievers chasing Frisbees  
or calves born at the penultimate day of spring frisking in pastures  
carpeted with lime colored grasses, dandelions like glittering space shuttles

landing safely in limpid blue oceans like transparent silks;  
the heroic astronauts resume the paperwork of their everyday lives  
to a tedious fanfare, the golden puppy now sleeps half the day  
the toddler bites into the velvety pink Easter egg to discover salt.

Friendships once fields of sweet clover, gone stale,  
weigh down your body like moldy hay bales left in the rain  
What do you do with entire continents of disappointment  
once exhausted by the early rages?

John Cage said if something is boring for five minutes  
do it for ten, if boring for ten do it for twenty, if boring for twenty,  
do it an hour, and so on for eternity. I think he had an answer.  
to cherry blossoms after the spectacular show and the heartrending petal fall.