

## Honeymoon

My mother lost one kitten heel  
in the gravel parking lot  
of a cheap Idaho Falls motel  
one snowy night in early May.

My father carried her to the room  
*like a sack of potatoes*, he said,  
spilling her onto a bedspread  
patterned with daisies.

She had, as a girl, imagined honey,  
that there would be honey, its sweetness  
dripping, and the moon  
like the song— its silvery light.

**Zenith, 1969**

Once I was a starfish in the hands  
of my astonished father  
who held me up to the black and white TV  
to see history in the making.  
I was a baby and could not speak,  
and all he could say

*(not daughter, what will become of us?  
what future?  
what gravity? how far is far?  
will we be lost out here? I'm scared  
our home is so, so blue)*

was moon.

## Feast

Those summers my sisters and I turned our hunger into a contest—  
*whose ribs stuck out the furthest?* Shirts pulled up  
to compare our flat-chested cages.

Around noon, we rode our beat-up bikes  
fenders rattling, kickstands knocking pedals,  
toward the city block of trees where parks and rec fed  
all the neighborhood kids  
the one meal we'd have that day:  
white bread baloney and mustard sandwiches,  
a Saran wrapped chocolate chip cookie,  
still chilled from the cooler,  
little milks if you had a nickel, a red apple,  
and sometimes, a stick of cheddar cheese.  
If the edges were green we said cheese *is* mold  
and ate it anyway.

At the end of summer when free lunch closed  
we foraged in the yard: blueberries  
until there were no more blueberries, nectar  
sucked from rhododendron trumpets,  
sourgrass we chewed into cud.

When we told our father we were hungry he'd smile and say,  
*Nice to meet you, Hungry!* and try to shake our hand.  
When our mother found us in the kitchen  
making wine from sprouted potatoes and dandelions,  
she sighed and went to bed.  
I stirred the wine while each of us said one wish:  
*Macaroni. Peach pie. Pot roast,*  
then filled our plastic cups.  
How quietly we sipped.

## Cheryle Jean

*"We must build houses for our mothers in our poems." – Aracelis Girmay*

After my mother chewed off the man's arm  
people took sides. The man's mistake  
was that he dropped his smartphone  
too close to the cage  
while taking stupid pictures  
and my mother wasn't in the mood.

He thought he could do what he wanted,  
but she was still in her slippers  
and worn-out robe, orange, striped  
with the markings of shadows cast through daylight.  
Now he has one less arm.  
It was the cage, the iron bars  
that let him believe she was harmless.

He demands what he wants, no matter  
if she's tired or  
that the place is a wreck,  
someone shit in the pool again  
and she has a toothache  
no one will fix, because  
who wants to get in the mouth  
of an animal who has let herself go?

When the church, social services, the IRS, the police, animal control, and the bank  
came to put my mother down, she said  
all she'd wanted was a bite  
of the rust-colored dirt  
outside the cage,  
and he'd gotten in her way.

## Ghost Elephants

—after Jean Valentine

“Vintage wedding dresses”  
“Symptoms of priapism”  
“Elephant sanctuary in Tennessee”—

these, the most recent Google searches  
on my mother’s iPad  
she needs me to fix yet again.  
Seven years cancer in the bone  
so I don’t ask.

Before I leave, I set traps  
for the fruit flies.  
She thanks me.  
Her husband, hands in pockets,  
thanks me.

When she’s gone I will remember this,  
and also the time  
I found a shattered mirror  
under her recliner, and  
the days after chemo, hallucinating  
she was a racecar driver, pacing the room  
looking for her keys, and the bucket list  
trip to Neskowin after radiation.  
She planned to shit in a towel  
if she couldn’t make it to a toilet.

All of this  
I will never not remember.

When she died, we sent a little money  
to that elephant sanctuary  
in Tennessee.

*Ghost elephants,  
Reach down,  
Cross her over—*