

Sonnet for the Atmosphere

Just once—and in the end, nothing was lost.
You took me where the stars lay against
the street. You asked me what mattered most,
your hand a thousand Geneses in mine, condensed.
Maybe love, I said. You watched me, your breath
a pulmonary asterisk. My heart's red giant
ate up the streetlights. I imagined death.
You said that wasn't it, love was only a kind of reliance
too easily named. I ventured *Curiosity*. I suggested *Enterprise*,
Explorer, *Spirit*. You laughed, and I thought then
I would yawn into a black hole. You shut your eyes,
splashed through a nebula's current, said: Try again.
I said I didn't expect to have a second chance.
If you'd prefer, you said—so we fell, burning, in comet-dance.

A Happening

And the death, when it came, how did it come?
Just like this: outside, cars importing divinity
to snow. A flock of trees rambling out of the
imagination. Women going into shops, men
attempting to mistake impatience for grief. A
small confusion in the parking lot. Inside, the
furniture expands to account for absence, it licks
its varnished, perfect teeth. This is what happens
after. But the death, when it came, how did it
come? Just like this: He says, *I am tired, but in
a kind of healthy way, you know?* He says: *Of late
I've watched many documentaries, especially
those about mountains.* He says: *When you get
up in the morning I feel so loved, it's nothing but
the fact that you wake up that makes me feel this.*
This is what happens before. And the death itself,
what was its substance? The news will carry this.
Tonight, the advice is given to keep your doors
open, turn off the heating, arrange your effects in
immaculate shapes. The neighbors say, *This is just
a small town.* The meaning of it falls around them
like a missile toppling through unbanishable air.
Gravel relaxes under cars. Snow goes over the
world. And the death, when it came, was just
something like this: narrower and narrower, a day
small enough that the world took it in. In the front
seat, a child, safe beyond reckoning, asks about the
weather. The parents, not wishing to talk about death,
say there are things you can't predict, only just lying.

Asian Koel¹

The morning throws a loop of gilded sound.
I catch it, though it takes a millimeter

of skin off my palms. It pulls me
over the dazzled reef of a jam, it

flexes me through a cloud of insects.
Then ratchets the sun over yolk-lipped antennae

so that the orb bounces off high-rises,
gingko-bright, and smacks the idiot eye of the dog

right where it hurts. I cling and watch. The day
is impaled like a stubborn god. I am a stain

on this sound, I am blight and
dissonance, my heart is latent as

a brood parasite. I spread my body
across this note, feeling the long gash

in the light, feeling an aching nerve, right there,
connect like a parliament of transistors,

my viscera pulling tight, a click
and whirr in the blood—

I have caught the author.
There is no escape. This is happening—

the sky folds up. My brain
lathers up with feathers.

My limbs clatter across the pavement,
my eyes water, a note keels

from my mouth. And now a storming
in the mahogany, a bruise

in the dappled nook. A red eye.
An idea of pity unhooks itself,

leaps forth.

¹ The Asian Koel is a crow-like bird of the cuckoo family, common throughout South and Southeast Asia. It is notoriously noisy in the morning.