

## Animalia

### Late October Song

The loose-skeined chevron  
of Canada geese  
honk in jazzy incantation  
long before they show,  
low in the dusky sky,  
sketching the slate  
north-south roof line,  
elongated necks stretched  
toward what is next:  
great geese signifiers  
of what is also now.

Ear up! they say.  
That is, listen!: you are not exempt.  
To languish or rage in brief reprieves  
of 60 degrees is to lie. So,  
sing your higgledy song  
and hang on tight:  
sing with the geese,  
*Straighten up and fly right.*  
*Oh, Sister, don't you blow your top:*  
song will give wing to your laboring heart,  
make nimble your hands to their task, and  
wed your mind to the moment.

## The Bee Laments Sleeping Through a Dramatic Shift in Circumstance

The rains were coming and after that, the freeze  
and so, in the dark, I picked an armful  
of English mums, the late blooming flowers  
that make me think this season will never  
end. But, of course, it does and it is tomorrow.  
I put them in a green vase turned  
by a friend who's moved away.  
Tall and rangy, the mums,  
in full bloom and blossom,  
are not the potted and pinched-back kind  
that sell as two-fers in the fall; they are ballerinas  
stretching while Degas sketches with whatever thoughts.  
In the morning, as I make my tea, I hear the buzzing  
of a bee; honey or bumble, I don't know  
until I see it on the windowsill. Asleep in a blossom,  
I'd brought him in and now he bumps drowsily  
around this lunar kitchen landscape, barren of all he knows  
but for the flower of last night's repose.  
I think to cradle him in my hands, then refrain;  
instead I place him in a mason jar  
from which he pirouettes out the door  
and into the freezing rain.

## Tick

Is it a wonder that with so little  
agency... – look: how fast and how far  
could I really book it? – not fast and not far.  
That is why I practice letting go,  
dropping from whatever height I have  
to whatever passes below  
and that way go a little distance  
on someone else's back.  
And if I fail to land on my life's ride,  
I have to wait  
and wait from a lesser place,  
a dried stalk of grass, a plume for flag-  
no sustenance for me, I need blood –  
wrapping my legs around the swaying staff,  
a moment's delight, then the shadow of a sole  
would seem to crush, but there's no crushing  
this perfect form, this martial tank in red and black.  
The boot becomes my whole world as it darkens down,  
but all I have to do is let go  
into the dark of a cloven crevice.  
And when I do, I sing – I soar! I have a ride.  
I crawl...I don't crawl! I walk with pride  
to the boot's edge and haul myself up:  
past the toggle's silver mirror, up  
the rope walk of the red lace, then say goodbye  
to the so bright light as I tuck under the hem  
and haul again, tired now, but determined, up  
a deep canal of wool until,  
at last, I'm on an open field of flesh  
surrounded by a forest of fur  
searching until I find  
the perfect spot to stick my spile, my tiny tap,  
and settle in, not letting go  
until I've had my fill  
of such sweet sap.

## **Minou's Last Life**

*For Minou (1994-2012)*

Being born in a barn was the first strike,  
Prey to poison and rats, boys and foxes.  
Nursing and mewling in a deep-treaded tractor tire,  
That would count for your second. At least,  
When it woke and roared and spewed black smoke.  
For the third, you were the smallest, the runt,  
The least likely to survive, and left behind  
When your barn cat mother moved the rest  
Of the litter to the loft, and yet...  
You opened the gift of your fourth, the bottle  
Of warmed milk, the prize - a home,  
A family - surely your remaining five lives  
Would tick by unspent, languishing  
In the hot breath of a heating vent. But,  
On you went, for your sixth - and here  
The story gets murky - a cauliflower ear,  
A car's tire, losing your hearing, gaining a gimp,  
An odd limp, an uncanny gait, your back  
Left leg, straight, lifted, pausing, an arrhythmic walk,  
Suggesting something wrong with spine or brain,  
But you are all there. And were there - on the corner,  
That night in August, a waif with fleas, willing  
One last life, one last year, before the long rest  
Beneath the Russian sage and coreopsis.

## Malva Sylvestris

Oh, God, let me be a bee  
free of distraction, but for the buzz  
that leads to the next, then the next,  
pale blossom of the common mallow –  
so common – yet this bee embraces  
the bouquet of delicate stalks as if  
ensconced in an orchid  
swaying on the powdered pistils,  
inhaling the pistillate pink,  
rolling, rubbing, a bumbling *frottage*  
covering every *crevasse* with this *frisson*  
of delight – until the black furred  
belly becomes white – how doubt  
a god that creates such a confluence  
of sun, scent, and song suffused with mission –  
a task whose success requires such  
consummate joy for its fulfillment. Yes –  
the world would end in a tidy disaster  
if all were fastidious flyers.