

Waiting for Toast

Waiting for toast, I lean,
head to cupboard door,
waking to an old undoneness.
Edgeless.
Eyeless.
A living palimpsest
of my father poured in this pose.

His thin plaid robe hung
from the curl of his spine.
Long slippered feet locked in linoleum.
When the toaster dinged him into being
an audible lurch brought him upright.
Over cereal, I saw him reemerge
in ironed black. Eyed him fastening
the hard collar with its hidden snap.
Watched him walk trimly out
to counsel and comfort.

I lean, breath folded.
Perhaps a pattern is traced
but stacked ruins frame
this unbrightened chest.
Ankles remain convinced
by inertia and the gaping
ache of my unreadiness.
I wait for toast.

Daylight yawns
over chalk white walls,
nudges darkness along.
Heaving through decades and density
I push back.
Veined hands on butter knife mine.

I drag my gaze across the windowsill,
weigh the dewy green.
There, chickens hop from their ramp –
gawky, sharp-eyed –
fill their gullets and step
unquestioning
into the day's logic.

Flying

Without knowing
I would not call this speed
or motion –
just vibration,
white noise –
and after a while
it is nothing too.

Settled in 9F
my hand around a plastic cup
I look past spotted window lens
to cloud field and blue.

But if I crane my neck
I see the steel-skinned wing
studded and creased
working its strength
trembling through the unlivable.

In the distant light
a white line fades and spreads.
Another raft of watchers
has been here.

Ice shifts
in clear cups.
We sip
and taste the tip of time
before getting
where we are going.

News

Standing at the kitchen window in Nana's flowered apron
stringy at the seams and thin from hand wiping
I lean on my hands and look out.
The greening yard and grazing chickens are patient
beyond any knowledge of waiting.
I want the air to warm or an egg to be laid
so I can finish making a meatloaf for my sister
who waits
for her husband to die
or live
or look at her like he really sees her
though she stopped giving him the chance
long before.

I forgot we'd given out our last dozen
before starting in with diced onion, pepper, garlic,
tomato paste and ground beef.
Like my mother always did
I took off my rings and set them on the sill
beside a small vase awaiting flowers to be cut
and brought indoors.
I squeezed the raw mess with my fingers
in the yellow and white mixing bowl
though I knew I'd have to do it again
when I found an egg.

Standing at the window in Nana's apron
flour pressed between its cotton threads
the skin of my hands dried out from washing
and cleaning and wiping down counters,
I wait for news.
I watch the pacing of hens and their long shadows
and feel the geologic pace of things that make us wait—
patiently or not,
beyond any care for our will—
that write us into recipes of family
then watch through the glacial eyes of eternity
for our hands in the mix.