

## **Café Sant Ambroeus**

Across the yellow omelet and the lightly sugared,  
sectioned half of grapefruit  
and the pancake stack with a whipped cream crown,  
across the heap of tawny hash browns and the tiny pats of butter  
like golden gifts under a tree, my son sits tall and still.

I tell him he has crossed a line, seems better than before.  
He says, I am still crossing the line (a line I see as a ribbon, or  
neon on a road at night).

He opens his phone to show me a photograph:  
a monarch butterfly on a frosted leaf against snow.  
In the next booth, a woman -- black beehive hairdo, face pale  
as an ice rink -- orders café au lait.

I summon the waiter.  
My son bends to fetch a fallen napkin.  
He disappears from sight beneath the table.  
I startle as though touched by sudden rain.  
I take nothing for granted.

## **the ant**

high up above the madness of the green lawn  
there is a flat chair and a small table and a glass of water  
this is my secret not even the dogs are welcome here  
yesterday I watched an ant carry in his pincers a green  
sprig as big as its body across the boards toward the place  
the roof connects another ant came around and ran a few  
circles and the ant with the leaf wobbled on with great  
strength and perseverance as I talked on the phone to my friend  
who is a counselor for refugees and I told her this ant  
could be a metaphor for all she was saying and she  
laughed and agreed and the sun kept shining though  
less and less so as night came on and we all of us  
settled into ourselves somewhere in this world  
while the ant family either did or did not welcome  
their glistening brother with his offering and his long endeavor  
and mighty unswerving determination to get back to them with  
the bright green thing which once grew also but no more  
and the sky turned slightly lavender because this is the gift  
we get over and over whoever we are whatever we carry

## at the barn

why are old people afraid of horses  
young people are not thinking  
about death and broken bones  
they are galloping around the indoor ring  
and jumping over tires while birds  
sing in the rafters  
even when the snow slides  
off the roof and makes a sound like thunder  
they are not afraid

but when the world is warm and the sky  
is blue and the sun hovers  
like a good nanny  
the old people tack up  
and circle the outdoor ring  
their tall black horses startle  
at the crows and the deer that  
come down from the forest

the young people do not understand the old people  
and the old people don't remember being young  
back when the world was red and crisp as an apple  
and lust was a cushion as well as a thing to gallop  
through shaggy shivering trees

o but you will find  
us all at the fountain afterwards  
washing the horses in the cool water  
you will find us all at the fence  
feeding them carrots and clover  
soft whiskered nostrils quivering  
it will be night by then  
and the world cold as a bit  
smelling slightly of leather  
and grass  
brown manes flaring in wind  
lacy lazy silhouettes against a dying sun  
with nothing to hold and no reason  
to hold on.

## **POETRY SLAM**

A dark man in rubber boots stands center stage, introducing.  
The first, in boots and a lavender tutu, tangles language, says  
she does not know who she is alone.

The second raps, and bounces on his toes.

The third sings, discordant, about his divorced parents.

He wants to crush them like a glass he can't part with.

A young woman with a headscarf tells: the history  
of black people does not begin with slaves.

It was so cold out when we left our eyelashes froze.

It was so cold.

But my brain felt like a Van Gogh painting,  
garish and stellar, messed up, singing with paint and light.

## Paddle Tennis

We thought you were friends,  
playful as otters in the sun,  
even in the cold, with the mountains  
blue and peaked with snow  
in the distance. We thought  
of you as friends. But today, Kay,  
your pupils were pinpoints  
against a watery blue --  
and your words in the warming hut: blaming and cruel,  
while Genevieve stared at her knees  
and seemed to agree  
with everything you stated, nodding her chin,  
her hair black, slicked back, fixed and firm  
with a floral fleece-lined headband. We  
tried to explain, but you didn't want to hear  
from us, were not willing to discuss  
the past, which held the fuller truth like a crockpot  
in a kitchen. You wanted to talk only  
about the future and your need for us  
to change. Backed up against the window in our parkas,  
we were not expecting this, and then  
we went out in the cold and not to waste the afternoon,  
we played, game after game, Julie and I determined to win,  
reclaim lost dignity and ground. But  
something was finished, forever gone, like land  
eroded by a wind. And yet,  
and yet, we raised our mittened hands into the air,  
while a neon ball ripped through the graying sky,  
a dislodged planet, a friendship unseated wobbling  
in a new and troubling orbit. Hey,  
will we have an end-of-year party this spring  
or do we hang this up  
like one of the old dented paddles  
that dangle, obsolete, against the wooden wall?  
And so,  
where does this go, my friends, as life and time play onward  
with or without us.  
Where does this go, as hair turns gray and wispy,  
breath condensing in winter's air, laughter's echoes  
fading against the frozen hills, smiles thawing  
in other rooms.  
Trivial, eternal, cruel, this battle shimmers --  
shimmers like hope and rage and everything that has ever

shimmered on this shimmering complicated nearly ruined earth.