

Babel Tree

You've heard of the tower. Well
I tell you, on my street
is an evergreen that speaks
as if in tongues, sounding
like a mob of children
crammed inside a classroom.

Who would think a tree could have
so much to say? St. Francis-
beneath-the-boughs,
presiding over his fellow
statues — cats and raccoons —
steadfast behind their fence,

provides a captive audience
for the prim trimmed evergreen
whenever it's infested
with that unseen sounding.
Like a multitude of tiny chimes
rung inside a church,

so the sparrows. You see, this tree is just
a container, a mouthpiece.
According to
The Birds of North America Online:
“when interrupted by suspicious noise”
they stop.

I tell you, they do. And who wouldn't
be surprised
if a tree fell
silent
the moment he or she
walked by?

Felled

The hard-hatted cutter climbs with rope and chainsaw,
lopping off branches like hunks of hair
from the top down, until only a shorn torso remains.

Back on the ground, he circles the trunk,
incising. The engine whines.

Two other men stand at a distance holding cables
tied to the highest stump. A third holds up a camera.

When the saw pauses, they gather
together, leaning back,
pulling, arms taut. Takes all their strength

to make the elm tip, then topple. A colossal thud
shakes the whole house.

Spectators on my neighbor's porch applaud.
They don't see me at my window

trying not to cry because this one tree —
that seemed alive while dying, that stayed standing tall as a tower —

has, in less than an hour, been rendered
horizontal and now
lies helpless as a human body.

The black birds never minded
it was leafless every season.

But a petition circulated.
I signed.

Bereft

That we won't go this year to Payne's to buy
Boston ferns (three for the backyard gazebo,
one for the front porch) and a few red geraniums
and a single green spike (for the terra cotta pot
by the driveway); that we won't open the shed,
pull out the muddied gloves and the wheelbarrow,
weed on our knees as if in prayer; that even though
we will never again share these rituals, spring will
return nonetheless and the earth will continue
undeterred, giving her garden the usual flowers:
daffodils, peonies, roses; that the black-eyed susans
went crazy during summer, as if nourished by her
ashes, my father tells me, months later, still
amazed; that she isn't here to see.

Greetings from Paradise

Here, breeze-rustled palm trees make a sound almost like the sound of brown oak leaves clinging to branches tousled by March back home where winter lingers.

Here, it's already spring. Grass greening the ground. Full-blown blossoming, purple roadside weeds, fuchsia, jacaranda, jasmine scent all over the island.

Here, some flowers look like birds and some birds look like flowers. Even the plainclothes crows strut their stuff with sunlit flare, glossy as polished patent leather.

Here, a loon joins me for lunch on the bungalow patio. Seagulls keep me company at the beach while I stroll along the sand's edge holding my shoes. Can you

hear me now that you've become a winged creature too, there in that other garden far from this earth? Can you see how much I still wish you were

here?

Going to Visit the Dead

I know you're here somewhere, intact.
God has given you back
what you lost —
your breast, your ovaries,
your vision, your weight, your energy —
everything. Almost. Lost

is also what we seem to be,
me in the passenger seat,
my Bulgarian friend in the back seat,
her mother driving.
The landscape all around us
wide and flat, we pass

no other cars or people. Only
an orchard, bare but budding,
adorned with *martenitsa* —
red-and-white tassels worn during March
to bring good fortune, good health;
tied on trees as soon as April

arrives. A sign —
winter ending, spring beginning.
Feathers of sunlight in your hair,
my friend says. I don't speak Bulgarian,
yet understand every word and when
her mother agrees — *yes, wings* —

I sob, knowing I'm going to
wake up from this dream
before we find you.