

*Camouflage*  
For Hunger, For Fullness

She sits on the edge of a suitcase,  
a sharp slant of autumnal light slicing  
the sidewalk into triangles,  
then rocks back and forth, as though  
about to take off into the stratosphere.  
That she hasn't eaten, that her hair has  
become a nest of black tangles, matters to no one.

She blends into bricks, wall.  
Her face, smudged, darkened, a shadow  
and her body, broken, unhinges at the joints,  
rearranges itself against bricks, disappears.

Another woman, holding a bag of samosas  
she's just purchased, walks by with the intention of  
eating beside a pool, or watching her favorite old movie,  
but instead she turns around, backs up.

She extends the bag of food to the seated woman,  
invisible woman, the woman whose arms and legs,  
face and torso have become vapor, dust, gossamer  
wings, smoke and spider's web.

The one who gives up her dinner,  
the one whose hunger wraps around her  
pass this beating heart, one to the other.  
As she fills, the other empties.  
The one who just background,

a ghost, solidifies long enough to eat and the  
woman who fed her raises up inches above  
the earth, tips of her sandals scrap,  
her chest arched upward, without witnesses.

*Stay*

She sits nude, a mushroom in a forest,  
while I bathe her.

Her thighs, spread petals  
her breasts, leavened bread,  
her eyes, dried plums

Warm water lifts away the weight of age  
drowns those nasty little voices that  
chatter and mow, Caliban's demons.

She becomes a fountain, a statue –  
hidden away in her shower, a  
small earthbound woman.

In her youth, she commanded the molecules  
in any room she entered, made men  
young and old her devoted servants.

She wove language like a master orator and  
conjured meals on canvas.

Now, water spills over her head, a wedding veil-  
she drowns, rises again, drowns.  
*ahhh*. Born again this instant when

she offers her arms as I wrap her in a towel,  
as though I have delivered her from the womb  
of her bathing, heat of shower, baptismal.

Morning brings with it a silencing,  
Italian coffee tendrils from a mug. We  
share the New York Times, her hair damp  
at her neck. *My child. My mother.*

My child.  
My mother.  
Borne of life's fluids and back she  
goes, water to earth,  
earth to ashes,  
ashes to silence.

## Can't Google This

Google can satisfy the itch to know, but not to taste red bean paste,  
to disprove or prove, but not to feel tenderness.

It puts an electronic flea market at our fingertips, sends a puff  
of crack-like enticement via hyper-links, and we follow, ghosted.

It cannot love like a man, cannot fill the house with aromas of  
Indian curry, cannot grow cilantro in a pot.

It can reinforce why and who we hate, fan the flames of perversion,  
lead a trail of blood and tears to the long ago vanquished,

But dreams do the same, and better as they swirl through sleep and  
moments with lovers gently spooning nourishment to one another.

The slant of Venice light on your sleeping face, your skin, burnished copper,  
how your breath, caught, then released, fills me with wonder and terror

The sound of wild green parrots (once some artist's pet, multiplied) wheels through  
palm trees as neighbors make dinner, sigh at another shooting, hug each other.

It can't best that first sip of morning coffee or offer  
a single instance of holy nothingness, its relentless need to

jangle and jingle, blink, bangle and bounce until  
we rise, red-eyed and unsteadily go to bed having learned

a whole lot of facts that melt together like crayons  
in an oven, but leave us scooped out and stupid with fatigue.

Give me a handful of buttered light, church light, small light  
and watch how one house after another winks dark-

And the obsession to know is laid to rest finally because  
not knowing is a state of grace. Suspension then

quiet in the absence of false knowledge, holding hands  
under the covers, the way sunlight pours into darkness into

coffee filters into the smallest of angels dancing moth-like  
where no one can see them. This is the blessed life.

For my Daughter, Aurora

There is no pain-free way to live a righteous life,  
no golden ticket that flutters down from heaven  
no detailed manual that arrives in your mailbox -  
just one moment strung to the next, molecule to molecule

Until you create a rope of such strength that  
not even the most sharp-toothed monster can  
break it, no not even the arrogant, or  
the entitled can rip or unravel.

And when tidewaters swell towards you, my love  
when mountains crowd your path,  
when a claw snatches at your breath  
remember the strength of that rope.

Remember the survivors who came before you,  
women who endured unspeakable moments,  
stillborn babies, the shocking slap of men's hands  
on their bodies, lost jobs, gutting loss, but then

Up they rose, vertebra by vertebra  
until they created a rope of such solidity that  
reaches to you now, unraveling loop by loop.  
It encircles your waist, hugs you, protects you.

It encircles your waist now, hugs you, protects you.  
Remember that. Remember them.

Hope in a Sifter  
-after the fires-

What she got, having outrun the fires  
was Hope in a sifter -

A screened frame with the word "Hope"  
scrawled on one side, an afterthought,

so she fell to her knees, dug deep, and  
pulled up cinders, a vaporized doll's head,

mom's melted gold necklaces,  
half dollar coins, locked together.

Then daylight bathed over a single chimney, revealed  
liquid photo albums, love birds, cooked in their cage -

she continued sifting, unearthing teeth, forks,  
it kept coming: a child's charred bib, entwined candleholders.

And in sifting, years fell away, seasons, conception, births  
the clouds scuttered by in fast motion,

a civilization's strata of bone and soil,  
soot and ancestral talisman.

She couldn't stop, the pile growing behind her  
until the hole became the earth

the earth the hole, until her entire lineage arose,  
past footprints running from volcanic eruptions

past Neanderthals, their first stone blades,  
past *homo erectus*, her hunter-gather foremother.

Deeper still to the hominoids' teeth, tearers of flesh  
to the fifty-five-million-year mark, her primate ancestor

curled around a tiny chimp child, daughter,  
mother together at last,

and so to the beginning of life, to Tiktaalik, our fish  
ancestor, wriggling and alive with Hope.

