

Four Places

The Clerestory

Air-sick, bad Chinese.
Now meet the family, sweetie.
Welcome to Corrales.
We sleep in the guest room because
 my room is gone.
The narrow bed that was impossible to
 make because the mattress was
 blocked in on three sides.
The shelves of trophies over the bed,
 heavy and ready to fall on the sleeper.
Square windows where one night I swore I saw
 red eyes staring back from dead dark,
 the murderer's ghost.
Thick beams where I hung flags so I
 could be international, which meant
 different.
The secret places where I hid
 things I found or stole or made that
 made me tighten in new places.
The guest room bed stretches unconfined.
These aren't even my books.
Even so, it is a comforting
 wall of books
 heavy and ready to fall on the sleeper.
First morning awoken to a
 braying ass,
 Corrales's alarm.

One of the old dogs had jumped
 through the glass window
 by the front door.
I sat just beyond
 hailing edges
 playing with a stuffed kitten
 soon named Brokit.
The dog and the glass had to be fixed.

That place was not folded.
The teacher was the teacher
 and that was enough to be complicated.
Even mountains were flat, flayed out
 on maps--you could walk to Moriarty

if you wanted to.
The house smelled of
 cold swamp
 in the summer.
Air across still water.
Stone, light, dry, thin.
No plush carpet.
Thin rugs on brick.
Hard couches of weathered pine,
 no place to nap.
Flavor with no respite.
Chile, no chowder.
Cold fish for a
 mellow summer.
The coast melts away when I return
 like land lifting from the ocean
 leaving behind high dry dust
 covered in skeletons.

No saving glass
 falling on the brick floor.
Wine seeps into cracks.
Mom said I was
 born talking,
 been here before.
It was my wine, but I felt young,
 knocking the glass with my elbow.

White cranes, green chile smoke,
 cold piñon inscribed
 on our folded hearts, sweetheart,
 like the hush of cottonwoods
 around the new house.
The new walls are cool and smooth
 not as rough as the old
 whitewash. Same tall space
 from window to window
 now refined: a theme, a shape repeated.
The old house on Valverde, shaggy thick timber and
 rough stucco, lurks next door
 like an ex-wife whose husband
 married her best friend.
The scar on the wall where the towel burned.
The busted skylight where the rough boys
 broke in.
Blood scraped down the stucco where

a drunk uncle fell,
failing once again to be
Santa.

The glass was never
put back together again.
Not burned or bloody but broken.

No humped sacred cows
wandered Valverde Road,
no terrifying eight-armed goddess
patrolled the bosque.

Our deities were drier,
the weeping woman I
never saw,
the crashing storm that
left behind bloody sunsets,
the murderer's ghost,
William Wayne Gilbert,
peering through windows
always on the other side of the glass
I prayed would not ever break.
That's how he became a god,
phosphorescent hours
lit in votive petition that
he would pass to another house.

I folded too, new against old,
living on two surfaces,
then three.

Years of being creased,
stiff joints and thin edges.

Then I discovered mountains were
hollow, holding fissionable death
the whole time I thought
they were flat.

Welcome home, honey.

The daughter hanged herself,
the beams in my old room
under the clerestory
were perfect.

Going back
is not an option, even though
I know there's something I forgot
there, left

behind the bookshelf, or buried under the piñon. The one that even survived being burned when we were burning away cottonwood leaves, because we burned whatever we could without leaving it behind hanging from the beams in the clerestory.

The next house has more skylights
shining like hovering angels
paid to illuminate--
a blue full moon turning
ochre carpet into
aged silver.

There are no clerestories, no
open beams no
hanging flags no
broken glass,
sweetie,
only a wall of picture frames,
shelf over shelf,
lit by a skylight
because we can't face burning anymore.
Not even candles on dry gods' altars.

Centre Street, Boston

Narrow old
sidewalk hearts
choked with
detritus cruft jetsam
clogged pores of
studenty interlopahs
rolling
in and out and in
tidal breaths of
phlegmatic Brahmins
lying on cobbles
pulled halfway into traffic
waiting to get run over
by someone infamous.

Valverde

Hymns of dust stick to the rented car. The same road
ruttet
graveled
washboarded

I slalomed across years ago--still,
and still the same:

hard, hot, dry. Until rains fill the ruts
with unmerited gifts
overflowing, pooling, washing out
onto the apple fields
and the mobile homes
and the acequias
and the arroyos
and the mountains
and the parking lots
and the other parking lots
and even the wildflower meadows so high up trees don't want to grow, but
paintbrush, blackeyes, and periwinkles
rush in.

Lakefront

Big shoulders and a
 thick tummy, but no reason
 not to show it off,
 hog butcher.
Your older sister from the South, the French one,
 she's seen some shit.
But you've got yours together, tool maker,
 cool by the lake.
More than a fling,
 turns out not a marriage.
Stormy brawler
 carry me like a sheaf of wheat.