

Horses

Tonight, your side of the bed is empty.
I drink when you're away, cradling the bottle,

my tenuous secret. In the movie I'm half-
watching, dusk shadows the hero as he parks

and jumps a fence, approaching a huddle of horses.
They don't skitter or complain. They seem to be

expecting him. They let him rub their noses.
Before we married, we hiked lava fields

in Iceland, a landscape marbled black and green,
cold gusts pushing us ahead. I was happy.

Near that mossy path behind a gate, horses
grazed daintily. The blonde one held your gaze.

You combed her mane with your fingers, your gentleness
striking, your eyes wet. I took a photograph.

It was then I knew your kindness would undo me,
but in the darkness of our bedroom now,

I am alone. I know you will return,
but somehow those sweet days of early love

don't feel like mine to keep. On screen a sudden
blast, fists of orange flexing against dark sky.

The horses scatter. The man runs toward his car,
astonished by the blaze. I've lost the plot,

but understand with certainty, my love,
that you are the horses, nosing grass in easy

moonlight, while I am the exploding car:
a hazard to flee and gape at from afar.

I want to warn you: get out while you can.
I want to keep you forever in my burning.

Hell's Half Acre

The day we drove across Wyoming, I pinned
my fears on home; your children's resentments
followed me west, shadowing me like bad weather.

The geology itself was an aftermath,
wind-scarred and cragged like an enduring face—
that kind of beautiful. From Riverton

to Hell's Half Acre, I brooded; your confusion
blurred the periphery. I wish I could
explain my anger, the menace of my dread.

I almost missed the sign which, along with chain
link fencing, was all that set the place apart from the miles
we'd already driven. So much spectacular

sameness begins to numb a person. The brittle
plains were savaged by chasms, cratered like
movie-set moons. I have been a stranger

in every house I've entered. Time reveals
itself in lines: stripes on a cliff face, rings
in a tree trunk, wrinkles across my brow,

cracks in our house's foundation. We walked
the fence in opposite directions. You took
a phone call from your daughter, so I kept

my distance jealously. The visit lasted
no more than ten minutes. The only photograph
I took is a closeup of the fence, the badlands

beyond a smudge. Back in the car I wanted
to say something redeeming, but you touched
my arm so gently, I was mute. I'm sorry.

I see only edge and threat surrounding me—
a flawed perspective— in truth the rocks
are soft enough to crumble in my hands.

Late September in Druid Hill Park

It is barely afternoon, but the owl's questions
fill the woods, pensive and incongruous.

Deer haunt my peripheries; I know from the sounds
of their movement. It's the kind of day we dream about

in the dank oppression of August, skin sticking
to skin, thirsty for cooler air. Was it just a week ago

that a violence of wind brought down twin oaks?
A week ago that a shattering resounded

through the nave? Her mother's wails. I hadn't been
to church in years. No one belongs at the funeral

of a child. I looked at my hands poised in my lap
like someone else's hands. At home, I held my son

until he pulled away. Today is calm, quiet
save the dead leaves crunching underfoot,

the songbirds' anxious chatter, the owl's
plaintive calling: *So soon? So soon? So soon?*

A Kind of Magic

I know what you've been thinking: how
does she have so much time to look out windows?

Each day offers an embarrassment
of hours for me to fill with thought

experiments and cardio, sessions
at my desk staring at the grass out back.

Yesterday a groundhog waddled across
the yard while I tried to understand

what to wear now that I'm not young.
On good days I spend hours rearranging

furniture, grateful for the strain in my quads,
the relief found in the tangible.

I know what you've been thinking—something
about women and overthinking. Something

about privilege or wasted potential.
If nothing matters, everything matters,

but still we assign values. I don't know
how to style my hair, how to define

my purpose. In the ink-dark hours
when the house breathes heavy with sleep,

I can't see anything in the window
but my own reflection. Waiting

reveals the world outside, a sharpening
of edges. Isn't this a kind of magic?

My face morphs into blades of wild
grass, then disappears completely.

Luminosities

Luminosity is more than light:
it's radiant power over time,

a lasting glow like Nordic summers,
that reedy yellow stretching thin

even over nighttime hours. Distance
is more than physical space. You feel it

in a shoulder curved away, the tensing
of a jawline. Unlike stars, we choose

what to reveal: a woman fading
into wallpaper, or her smile

bright as planets. Once I caught you
seeing me across a crowded party.

Neither of us moved, but energies
shifted. Seeing your face aglow,

my own reciprocated light.
What I don't know could fill galaxies,

but I've seen magic in the space
that lies between knowledge and belief.

On a spring day, my son comes to me despairing

Vivid pink and lilac, the thickening green
of passing time: no color I can see

doesn't promise new life, fresh blossoming.
The yellow bursts on the neighbor's acacia mock

my dark mood. Even as the sun came up
I grieved the fragility of all I love.

The deer bounding beyond the fence will soon
be lost behind the fullness of summer leaves,

another season gone. By the time he wakes,
I've already dried my eyes. Inside, I water

the succulents, the ice plant's leaves like origami
boxes. *I just feel so alone*, he says,

his face a kind of mirror. I nod, then point
to the trailing jade. What began as cuttings, shy

and spindly sprigs, now crowd my desk with their sprawl.
I can't bear thinking of his loneliness.

Meanwhile, our cat basks in a patch of brightness,
directing us to see, after all, the light.

First Love at Four Corners

The line for photographs stretched past the fence
surrounding us. My son held our place while I

waited for water in another line that stretched
beyond my patience. The sun was hot,

the monument no more than sidewalk stones
and a seal encircling the place where four states meet.

In stalls surrounding us, Navajos sold souvenirs.
After posing for pictures, we browsed earrings.

That summer, my son's first love loomed. He chose
a pair of studs, yellow crystals. *Like the sun,*

he said. After two more days of driving, he
would catalog his doubts, reveal the nag

of wanting out, the other shoe about to drop.
But that day at Four Corners, he was at ease.

We took selfies, panting in the heat, miles
from home, in four places all at once and also

no place at all: a paved patch of dusty earth,
a flat monument to man-made boundaries.

We marveled that day at the intersection of time
and space, how far we'd come, how easy it was

to become greater than we were. That day
we transformed, simple trinkets turned to stars.

On the Precipice

Some nights I wake up terrified of the world
our children will inherit: the rising oceans
of plastic, poisonous factory fumes, water
tainted and growing scarce. It's harder now
to be alive than it was when I was young.

Trees stand erect, as stern as prison bars.
The earth is soft under our feet, all fallen
leaves and moss. We hike for exercise, counting
our steps and calories, forgetting to
look up. Once, on a cliff's edge I believed

I could see the entire world before me, but
it was only a few miles. My son may not
have children of his own, so dim our prospects
moving on. Who can blame him? I'm useless
with abstraction, can't fathom economies

or galaxies or time. *Future* is a word
I can't grasp. The world has always been terrible
with beauty, indifferent and unattainable,
but we are ruled by greed, all sticky fingers
and grasping hands. We want and want and want,

and tell ourselves we *need*. When I was small
and home with fever, I lay on the couch, called
it my boat. I had to stay afloat, so kept
what I needed in arm's reach. But now my needs
are vast. I take five different medications

for an illness I can't see. I won't watch footage
of polar bears starving or aftermaths of bombings.
I don't check my pockets when beggars ask
for bus fare. I've grown hard, impassive—nothing
like who I thought I'd be. I wouldn't say

I'm selfish, but who admits a thing like that?
Human suffering surrounds us, but I
have deadlines, bills to pay. All the things I fear
threaten to drag me under. My son assures me
he'll be fine. His words become my lifeline.