

Clearing

Since Harvey's on his tractor for the first
cutting of the summer I'm glad I picked
paintbrush hawkweed and daisies early
this morning Wild turkeys squawking at the edge
of the mowing complain his noisy occupation
displeases them exposed to fox and falcon now
Where will they hide to feed He chose today
for the dry breeze rifling rush and bluestem

All of July and August lie ahead but I want only June
light dappling mountain ash They say to live in the present
requires we let go every second of our lives
He keeps a mowing by mowing for July's meadow rue
and asters To live in the present they say become a fern
a prism a membrane through which time mows

Moment of Amazement

As if to linger, unhurried, in the quiet
afterlude of her arrival, the unnamed

newborn in my cousin's arms unfurled
long fingers and stretched open her mouth

which issued a simple, oblong yawn.
With undulating hands, she sieved the new

nothing of air, all dark hair and lashes,
a creature so slick she seemed to be still

breathing underwater on feathery gills.
Of her mother's skin and smell she partook

already; also of her father's, holding
her two year-old sister near, so she could

see and touch the journey on the creature.
Close by, the midwife in her scrubs

wrote notes, then leaned in towards the family
of four, that, moments ago, had been three.

I left before the living wail shattered
the hum of monitors and murmurs, but

in the relief and exhaustion of that room
I saw the mouth find the breast and latch on.

Two Dogs, One Wise

The gentle purebred bought
at eight weeks lies down

beside his bowl and looks away
towards the mountain, permitting
the damaged dog to lick his bowl

He has the wisdom of one well-loved
from birth who learned to ignore the growls
and lunges of the dog who lost

her place and was sent away
and whom I rescued He turns his gaze from her
as the books explain a superior dog

will do to avoid a confrontation
She circles his bowl, she stands between him
and his bowl but he is listening

with his nose and his tail to a distant
music the beloved carry inside them

Elegy for the Science Teacher

Maria D. Peters, 1915–2013

Mrs. Peters has died at 98 and I'll never get a chance to apologize for all the trouble I brought to 7th grade science, where she demonstrated how the folding-door spider dug ten-inch tunnels into rotting logs with spiny mandibles and lined the walls with silk and left a bit hanging out to form a door from which it catapulted after dark. In the circus of natural history I was the class clown, she the vivarium; her faith included

the decomposing log and the chemical chatter of beetles. Born in Breslau in 1915 she spoke with a German accent about *British Soldiers*—the red-capped lichen that thrives on decaying conifer—and the slimy slug that propels itself with an undulating muscular foot along the forest floor. Colonies of carpenter ants and bees proved the Quaker principle of cooperation: her ecosystem, her religion. In London during the war, she taught Basque refugees by speaking Latin.

I failed to plot the simple graph on Darwinian snails. She pioneered the PA School of Horticulture for Women where girls kept bees, canned fruit, learned farm carpentry and soil science, studying the energetic sow bug with seven pairs of legs and a carapace of overlapping plates. Recently, people have come around to her belief in conservation, sustainability. A tiny woman, sometimes for emphasis she would pull out the bottom drawer of her desk and stand on it. We all laughed.

Ah, Mrs. Peters, did the inter-relatedness of fungal spore and wind move you to drive the Schuykill Expressway every Tuesday to pack up clothes for needy families? I could not appreciate the watershed you made of your life, linking all living things by a common course. Twenty years ago, at a reception you told me of your father's best friend, a Jewish scientist who refused to leave Germany in 1935. *My father begged him to go* you said. *My father cried* you said. *He never forgot him.*

Bluefish, 1970

My first summer in P-town neighbors taught me *Putanesca*
oil capers olives marinating fish in the tiny kitchen
of the 3-bay half- cottage I rented with my unemployment
check blocks off Commercial Street
where the drag queens called *Hello, Dolly*
and bluefish sold for \$3.99 lb all summer

At Race Point fisherman anchored in wet sand fought
the indigo wind the inky surf bluefish on their lines and
in coolers and in the A & P where I stared at the handsome
butch women with their girlfriends in town for a week
from Kansas and Ohio desire thrumming the narrow
streets and the clamorous angles of Provincetown's

rooftops desire incoming as the tide I read and wrote
by day and thereby earned my nightly trip to the women's bar
to disco to cigarettes and the compulsive disappointment of leaving
alone at 2 a.m. for home past revelers sharing pizza at *Spiritus*
you never know what the senses will retain just last week
at the market I overheard *look they have bluefish today*