

Mulberries

The summer you learned to let everything go
was the summer I learned how to coax my body through a day,
how to strap it onto roller blades and glide ten miles
with a despondent son. How to pull that body
through a landscape.

How to perform the simple, impossible tasks
of dinner at a small table, of saying the same things
over and over. How to quietly watch that teenaged son
walk through a new town with kids I was unsure of.

The summer you stepped out of this life
was the summer I learned
about small gestures and beautiful weeds.

Running through fields
and carrying back yarrow and Queen Anne's lace.
It was time to take a large life
and fit it somehow
into a much smaller one.

Downstairs the neighbor's new baby was crying.

A woman across the street brought cookies
on a china plate. In the backyard
the mulberry tree was wild with starlings.

Someone in a house behind me
began playing the harp in the evenings.

I would sit on the back steps and listen, thinking about
the heart of whoever it was, playing like that.

What it must know
to play like that.

When the Spirit Leaves the Body

For me it's not so easy
stepping out without stepping back in.

I left you by becoming thin,
laying myself down
between the pages of what you read,
leaving just enough to remind you
of what was missing.

But before I bow out gracefully,
I've forgotten a hat
or gloves. I'm outside now
peering in at you through lace.

Through the last open window of the evening
I call in. I have one last story
about my dog.
(I'm leaning on the sill as I tell this.
You aren't looking at me. Still,
I can feel your attention.)
When he had to be put down
I held onto him,
whispering *It's ok. It's almost over.*
I wanted him to leave here with
me loving him hard at the last moment.

And afterward
he stayed for a few seconds
as a kindness to me.
Then I felt clearly
his soul rise up
and my love follow him
like a tail on the end of a kite.

Blue Girl

There's a blue girl walking around in my mind
and I like to listen to her tiny audible sighs.
She thinks she's in a foreign landscape
and has lost her way.
Perhaps it feels like a dream to her—peopled
with faces from the past,
and an odd juxtaposition
of vehicles with their doors open,
water everywhere, and the constant feeling
of something left undone.
When she gets out
she'll get a dog
who will lay his head on her legs as she sleeps.
She means to sleep again cleanly,
undaunted by the way this world and the next
bleed into each other. She's trying to remember
where that opening was.