

MEMENTO

We look at the world once in childhood.

The rest is memory. Louise Gluck

In my first house of cut-up puzzles
Mother disappears behind jumbled
heights, walls, windowpanes—

a domain of no lullabies
but instead, pauses.
In a room under elms

stars pelt the glass.
Hunger returns. Under my chin
white ruffles loop endlessly.

I remember to this day
the curved bassinet, dusty pink,
how I lived within its wicker.

Later she stored it on the porch
where, even now, years later,
it calls me to return.

MY [BROKEN] [FORBIDDEN] INDIGENOUS IDENTITY

Cats walk night's edges
shapeshifters turning into lynxes

and mountain lions nearby whiskered
ear tufts almond-shaped green eyes.
The first time I dream of cats that day

I find Julie Buffalo Head's painting
Blood and a Single Tree drenched in vermillion

Her first crow looks outdoors from a windowsill
Another holds chalk draws a spiral

a portal where words rise in smoke prayers

A raccoon against a wall bleeds red
from fatal wounds It reaches for blue

A deer lies on the floor tongue lolling
its side covered in Ponca floral designs

A man in a suit turns his cougar face to me

Na shēwanàkw White Man
What have you/I done to us?

LEVITATION DURING COVID-19

*In Breughel's Icarus, for instance, how everything
turns away / Quite leisurely from the disaster....*

W. H. Auden

My paired shoulder blades should be wings
for flight among new angels
arriving after COVID deaths.

Like Icarus I should soar over the bay
until the dead appear as distant waves—
my friends and Menominee brother-in-law.

At that height, the sting of grief will fade.
Rolling lines of surf will be a string of pearls,
rippling and luminous in sunlight.

Yet my flesh arms flail without feathers. They cannot
lift me high enough to see the horizon
where sorrow ends. Instead, from a hill,

I see Icarus fall, splash. And the others. I am unable
to calmly turn away from the disaster.
Gravity pulls me into Earth's dark center.