

Connecticut Avenue

Early spring, trees still leaded frames  
for skycolors.

Rush hour, so we wait, looking.

From the car I envy  
walkers on the sidewalks.

The green-bronze lions flanking the apartment doors  
watch with me—

An older woman—wait! she's my age—  
stops, thinks, tries the great door—  
no, not this one—she continues her journey.

I look past commuters who sit in the bus shelter,  
captive to their phones

at a young woman who stands, deep in a book.  
Cover uncurled, somber black —Aristophanes? Dickens?

I watch her turn the last page,  
intent in her moment

as she is in the book.  
Can I be like that again?

The light turns. I leave her  
as she leaves her heroine.  
This life tugging both of us back,  
that relentless current.

## Dream Lagoon

“the goldfinches are back, or others like them” —Elizabeth Bishop

I get it now, how  
they could bear to see  
this lithograph hanging over the fireplace.  
For fifty years.  
Instead of enshrining him in photos  
or preserving his room,  
with the money from his last paycheck  
they bought this.

Because you can't erase a son.

So you put him back in a place he loved,  
in a boat. Today is grey and still  
and the palmettos hover high overhead  
fronds alive, water alive.

There's no difference really, between the boy  
and the water, the sky, the shore, the trees.  
There's no difference because there's no living boy  
to haul the boat up onto land held together by mangrove roots  
covered with old Spanish moss and dried palmetto fronds.  
There's no living boy to come in asking what's for dinner,  
to empty his pockets of the day's shells, dried urchins, crab claws.

In the place he loved best he's a creature like any other,  
where things are growing and dying all the time  
but also unchanging—today's water is the same  
as yesterday's water. Even when it's different, it's the same.

## Homo Sapiens

Indian summer, we used to call it, but now whenever the temperature hits ninety in October we see the future we're creating.

Meanwhile the spiders are casting their thick autumn webs,

one such on the line where I'm hanging sheets.

Each silken junction holds a plump amuse-bouche and I'm carefully working around someone's feast, but then my sheet snags the spider

and now the nickel-sized red creature is clambering down the cloth and I scream and try to shake her off but she drops another thread anchoring herself to the sheet and now I've mangled her web.

I shake the sheet again and hang it, hoping the spider has dropped away, or will but hours later she is still there on the white expanse, folded like a DeLorean, legs neatly hidden. Rather than examine her in her retreat, I find a stick

and bat her to the ground, successful this time, oh mighty me.

From the blinded Cyclops, Odysseus stole the sheep.

I fold my laundry and look again at the mangled web,

wishing I'd captured its beauty on my phone when it was whole.

## Orchard in Blossom (Apricot Trees)

-Vincent Van Gogh, 1888

As if the trees hold snow, spun sugar, cloudlets, bare branches adorned with a light that casts no shadow. The ground shows its own festive confection of blossom and it begins to green, ahead of the trees. In the distance, a red roofed building with a long thin chimney. A factory. This is a painting of what man hath wrought, the fruit trees planted in neat rows, the red roof making the factory a thing of pride. No, it is a painting of what is far beyond our reach, of the delicacy of spring. A man ploughs behind the orchard, his figure frail as an apricot blossom, nearly an apparition. Man is, after all, an apparition here—here in the making of the thing (the orchard and factory) and here making the painting. Imagine the turpentine cutting the intoxicating odor of the blossoms, the ragged industry smell from that chimney, imagine the April morning chill.

## Ode to Weeds

Here is the chickweed, with its starry mien,  
and here the buttercup, bright oracle  
of who likes butter best. Here are the  
goldenrods, strong tassels waving,  
beacons of pollen along the asphalt.  
Here, Queen Anne's lace, with  
a drop of blood in each galaxy of flower,  
and shepherd's purse, with  
green valentines proffered to elves.  
Here is the morning glory, a furled  
trumpet of color. Here the buttonweed's  
shy flowers found only by the hungry.  
Here are the cockleburs, pitchfork and  
pokeberry, lambsquarters, sheepsorrel  
and milkweed, a meadow of bright rags  
bordered by concrete. And here  
the butterflies, winged messengers  
of a nonpartisan god of mercy, and their  
consorts, buzzing balls of pollen-laden  
fuzz. But look there, on higher ground,  
  
where stanchions of nursery bred trees  
guard the combed grass of medians  
the color of money.

## Time Portrait

Lines appearing, as on a woman's face

Yes, sorrow, but much more

Need departs, the shell cracks

Strange, how beauty returns, transformed

Polished, throughout

In the silent space, lines pass, as in sorrow

The face, years of effort

Yes, need cracks

Strange, the shell departs, transformed

Throughout, the face's dimension appears

Winding lines through beauty

the shell showing years of effort

cracking sorrow

A face shows years of need

lined in beauty

space, transformed

## Steinway

As if your skill could set you free:  
You want to immerse  
yourself in notes, the sorrow  
of others turned to palaces, glades,  
shadow and light and the scent  
of lilac drifting through  
an open window, the colors  
staining, backlit by sun.  
To play through the thick rope  
of grief. A way back.

## Sugarloaf

At the top of Sugarloaf Mountain  
now with with my father, 84,

every step on the uneven trail a worry after he tells me  
sometimes his legs give way and he lands

on his face, our view is impeded  
by two other hikers in whom

the hormones of youth buzz,  
only for once it's she doing

all the telling, about her business  
in bit coin and how her partner

just died — he was 70 — so now  
there's a lot more work for her

and she's moving to Stuttgart  
next Sunday where her boyfriend

has a job and the man she's talking  
with is silent but I have a lot

of questions but it's not my conversation  
and going down will be

a lot harder than going up.



