



## **Nighthawk**

Last night I dreamed my father,  
twenty years gone, tried to message  
me by way of bird song and frantic  
flutters, pecking the plate glass window  
in that Edward Hopper painting—  
some primal bird beak code,  
an SOS from the other side.

I am hunched over the counter,  
pen and paper, marginal light,  
pale as a day in February,  
jotting down random letters flickering  
inside my head like heartbeats,  
tart against my tongue, songish  
as a toddler's nursery rhyme.

My sister, out of nowhere, screams  
*write faster* in that voice she used  
when we were kids. I hand her a map  
and a list of local therapists.

I feed every dogged vowel and boneless  
consonant to the mouth of night,  
a litany to hold off morning. But blue  
dawn creeps in anyway, words piled  
to the ceiling, a hundred apologies deep.

## **Pawpaws Are Ripe**

Bumper crop, enough to sate tastebuds,  
skins split open on the spot, pulp scooped  
fingers-to-mouth, the rest collected  
for sweet breads, hand-churned ice cream,

home brewed beer. I smile at all the ways  
my people have come to preserve  
this delicate fruit, one of the few treasures  
of this ridge not yet stripped or clear cut,

fragrant like a ripe banana, hints  
of strawberry, pineapple, mango,  
flesh creamy yellow, spicy  
brown seeds—same sown centuries ago

by Shawnee, Delaware and Mingo.  
Once a year I harvest, render, reflect,  
return seeds to native soil, on my knees,  
every turn of the trowel a benediction.

## Henhouse Anomaly

I managed to zip through three  
of five errands, on a quick  
trip into town, before the lack  
of personal space wigged me out.

Just home, searching  
for who-can-remember-what,  
I hear Mr. Rogers, my Langshan rooster,  
crow—a garbled cackle-lack.

I find him alone in the back yard,  
tail feathers gone, marching a jagged line.

Sprinting like a pint-sized pullet,  
I find all but one of the hens  
inside their shack, balanced high  
upon the rafters, cluckering obscenities.

Heart attack pending, I call  
for my favorite, Gretta Guinea,  
who darts from the woods,  
flipping me her sideways stink-eye.

How quiet everyone is now.  
Even the geese have hunkered down,  
same name vexing every tongue,  
*Flucker Fox.*

## Every Song A Sigh

My family faced each Thanksgiving  
with something like hope, a residual  
reenactment we clung to. All of it  
handily snookered by my sister's demons.

There was turkey—all the smells  
you smell at your table were served  
at ours, sweet corn, candied yams,  
buttery biscuits, accusations.

We'd bow our heads for the blessing,  
Daddy reminding us we were built to love.  
Mama would shout *amen*, my sister would snort,  
make fun of Jesus. Mama cried.

Outside the sky stretched and yawned,  
temperature invisible. I imagined  
myself a songbird, dips and swirls,  
a clear rippled coolness of breeze.

## Because You Were Always So Eccentric

Crows came—swear to God,  
pecked at windows, nosey as  
church ladies in sleek bleak choir robes,  
squawked perilous predictions.

But even they, fleet feathered,  
urgent, Goth as teenagers  
at a Bauhaus concert,  
could not best destiny.

Here you are ash and bone  
and perfectly pulverized pelvis,  
urn bronzed and banal, etched  
in shifting shapes and small buddha.

How could you know  
the pelvis, dense and rigid,  
does not degrade inside the roaster,  
must be man-handled, coaxed,  
pounded into powder?

How the funeral fiduciaries  
perch side by side, their slaty,  
buzzard-backs hunched,  
rasping the lurid details—

a meticulously manicured  
talon, indicating where to sign  
on the dotted line.

## Reincarnation

If asked, I would choose  
a bush bean, stringless,  
I want to stay tender and green,

camouflaged for days inside  
leafy lime plumules, umbilicaled  
to others likewise inclined,

not taking any shit from  
the city cousins, half-runners,  
all with commitment issues.

When my time comes,  
I will puff my pod, wriggle to the front,  
chant, *pick me, pick me,*

knowing the boil up that awaits—  
the dance, the heat,  
the bubble and fizz.