

The Trembling

I.
In the garden the bees, sputtering
for the lattice flowers,
graze my son's fingers
as he pinches the petals
and opens his mouth for a taste.
He doesn't know bees. I know
sublime pain
and their throbbing flight up close.
In my chest, a sting: my son
long gone, swollen
and unhinged.

II.
Since the dead can't see color,
my dead friend came to me

with one gray and one dusty white wing.
He told me there is no love

to redden the pine and blue the birch.
Clipping flowers for his grave,

I told him I could not see for the sun
and asked what he learned at war.

In a black and white voice he replied
I shot a young girl.

III.
Summer's end: a heaving breath from the Gulf.
My son wakes yelling for me.
Mosquitoes have bitten his face.
The dead one hasn't spoken again,
has sent birds and insects inland
as emissaries. My boy swipes
at them. Falling face first,
he shouts fly, fly, fly . . . crying
into the screeches of starlings
as they lift from the trees
in one swift wave.

IV.
Halloween: all the masks
hide my dead friend,
his eyes and lips looming
beneath vampires and superheroes.

Dressed like a wolf,
my son bobs for apples.
When he rises from the water
his teeth grip the fruit hard.

He shakes his head
and holds on. Sitting at a distance
on rough golden leaves,
I am the wall he runs into.

What would he do
in the future, gun in hand
and locked
in his own trembling?

V.

I walk through the cemetery, an invader
battered by the sun; my friend,

the soldier who last wrote me from barracks
built as quickly as a trick,

now sinks into the edge
of daylight, the land's distant ray,

a glistening
bell, collateral . . .

VI.

I bear my son like a field pack.
As I trudge through the snow,
he warns me of deep puddles
in the lawns. Skirting them,
I walk serpentine and tire quickly.
He is eating red wet cherries.
There is juice on my neck and shoulders
fresh from his lips.

When we arrive, I hunch over the gray
stone my friend has become.
Underneath us waits every color:
asters and blazing stars,
oleanders and the tremors
of dark waters.