

## Goldenrod

I'm no botanist. If you're the color of sulfur  
and growing at the roadside, you're goldenrod.

You don't care what I call you, whatever  
you were born as. You don't know your own name.

But driving near Peoria, the sky pink-orange,  
the sun bobbing at the horizon, I see everything

is what it is, exactly, in spite of the words I use:  
black cows, barns falling in on themselves, you.

Dear flowers born with a highway view,  
forgive me if I've mistaken you. Goldenrod,

whatever your name is, you are with your own kind.  
Look—the meadow is a mirror, full of you,

your reflection repeating. Whatever you are,  
I see you, wild yellow, and I would let you name me.

## In the Grand Scheme of Things

It sounds like someone wound up the wrens  
and let them go, let them chatter across your lawn  
like cheap toys, and from here an airplane  
seems to fly only from one tree to another, barely  
chalking a line between them. We say *the naked eye*  
as if the eye could be clothed, as if it isn't the world  
that refuses to undress unless we turn our backs.  
It shows us what it chooses, nothing more,  
and it's not waxing pastoral. There is too much  
now at stake. The skeletal rattle you hear  
at the window could be only the hellion roses  
in the wind, their thorns etching the glass,

but it could be bones. The country we call ours  
isn't, and it's full of them. Every year you dig  
that goddamn rose bush from the bed, spoon it  
from soil like a tumor, and every year it grows back  
thick and wild. We say *in the grand scheme of things*  
as if there were one. We say *that's not how*  
*the world works* as if the world works.

## Rose Has Hands

My phone doesn't observe  
the high holidays, autocorrecting  
*shana tova* to *shaman tobacco*,  
*Rosh Hashanah* to *rose has hands*.

Apples and honey for a sweet  
new year, or *apples* and  
*honestly*, or *news* and *years*—  
always more than one.

Yesterday my daughter asked,  
out of what felt like nowhere  
but must be a real place  
inside her, *When people kidnap*

*kids, do they kill them? Why*  
*would someone kill a kid?*  
When I texted my husband  
this, my phone corrected

*kill* to *Killarney, kid* to *kids*.

We have two. My phone suggests  
their names. Suggests *what*  
*the duck*. Suggests news, years,

and honestly—what truth  
can I tell her? I don't  
ducking understand, I don't  
understand ducking any of it.

**At the End of Our Marriage, in the Backyard**

We let the lawn go to wild violets and dandelions,  
to crabgrass, to clover bending under the weight

of so many honeybees, our children can't run  
barefoot. We do nothing, letting ivy snarl

around the downspouts and air conditioner,  
letting milkweed grow and float its white feathers.

We do nothing and call it something—as if  
this wilding were intentional. If there is honey,

I tell myself, we are to thank. All summer  
the children must wear shoes. We sit out back

while they crouch in the clover, watching the bees,  
calling out when they see sunny crumbs of pollen

on their legs. Maybe no one will be stung.  
Late in the season, we sit ankle-deep  
in weeds and flowers. In weeds we call flowers.

## Starlings

The starlings choose one piece of sky above the river  
& pour themselves in. They must be a thousand arrows  
pointing in unison one way, then another. That bit of blue  
doesn't belong to them, and they don't belong to the sky,  
or to the earth, or to us. Isn't that what you've been taught—  
nothing is ours? Haven't you learned to keep the loosest  
possible hold? The small portion of sky boils with birds.  
Near the river's edge, one birch has a knot so much  
like an eye, you think it sees you. But of course it doesn't.

## For My Next Trick

*Where was I, she asks,  
before I was in your body?  
—What was I?*

*You were nowhere,  
I tell her, nothing.*

*Then where do we go  
next? She presses.*

*Keeps pressing. Back*

*to nothing?*

*If I could believe*

*I'll see her again,  
waking from whatever  
this world is into*

*another world,  
I would—*

even if the ending  
is so tidy, it spoils  
the whole story.

We can't talk  
about birth without

talking about death,  
can't talk about death  
without talking

about separation,  
that thick black

redaction.

Do I tell her we end  
like a book—*the end*?

That when we're gone,  
we're gone, too gone

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to miss or even  
remember each other?  
She knows

what *vanish* means.  
Pretending

to do magic,  
she says it as a verb:  
*For my next trick,*

*I'll vanish you.*  
I tell her the stars

are the exception—  
burned out but still lit.  
*No, not ghosts,*

*not exactly. Nothing*  
*to be scared of.*

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## Airplanes

My son is safe in bed, the opposite  
of gutshot. He is three years old

& wearing new airplane pajamas  
with feet & a zipper running

ankle to throat. My son  
is sprawled on his back, arms flung

*don't shoot* wide. This year  
I was in none of the pictures

& yet I am in all of them.  
That's me, there, the shadow

that shielded his eyes each time  
the year shot another

mother's son in the street. No,  
not the year. Never the year.

His body is white; it's only his eyes  
I have to shield. In the dark

I watch his chest rise & fall,  
his lids flicker. My son

is sleeping, covered in airplanes,  
& the airplanes are smiling.

## Bride

How long have I been wed  
to myself? Calling myself

darling, dressing for my own  
pleasure, each morning

choosing perfume to turn  
me on. How long have I been

alone in this house but not  
alone? Married less

to the man than to the woman  
silvering with the mirror.

I know the kind of wife  
I need and I become her:

the one who will leave  
this earth at the same instant

I do. I am my own bride,  
lifting the veil to see

my face. Darling, I say,  
I have waited for you all my life.