

## Woman on the Balcony

She leans on the silver railing in her nightgown,  
limnal as a flower in the afternoon light.  
Warm winds stir the air. No one  
left in the parking lot. Still. Hot.  
Breathless from the few steps,  
she pillows her head  
in her arms.

Below her summer gardens shine,  
flowers of pure color, roots floating in water,  
as she is floating, on the threshold, she knows,  
a woman with dark eyebrows, old dressers of clothes,  
one grownup son, years of houses in Vaud,  
the dinners made, the bills paid,  
the moments with Joe –  
her heart fluttering, slow now  
but still she stands, keen, and grips  
a cool railing, gazing down to the gardens  
spread out under trees, the bees crawling in  
the blush of lavender, the deep orange center  
of Cheyenne spirit coneflowers,  
roots drifting in water,  
as she is drifting and she holds on –

She is Juliet  
she is Demeter  
she is Persephone  
she is changing, changing,  
into all she has known and read –  
she is Changing Woman,  
a purebred root drifting in water,  
sunlight aching in her head –  
surrendering to the wind.

She becomes Isis on the Nile,  
green fields, fertile mallow reaching up for her.  
How smooth the pine penstemon, tall white iris,  
columbine that dance like medieval jesters  
in maroon yellow suits, with tipped boots  
around the butterfly garden –  
her arms weak as ribbons –

but mouths of velvet violet petunias, scalloped  
into wings, open upwards to her,  
fading and blossoming, tint of  
petals singing in the sun,  
the water trembling  
in the cups of the flowers –

all just below her.

She lifts her hand, swims in the wind  
to touch them, still clinging to the railing  
though everything is moving is turning liquid,  
every living stem is speaking, footing the air –  
it was different before when she could grasp  
each person, each thing, name its meaning,  
each of the moments each day here has  
changed everything, the other years  
of her life are wallpaper, gone,  
her mother is down there

examining the curl of lilly,  
the twirl of poppy, the tiny heads  
of rose gold verbena, trailing down the  
sides of heavy, omnipotent clay pots.  
The slow stately roll, side to side, of  
the long fingers of willow.

She catches her ancient eye,  
smiles back, wraps her light arms  
around her cotton gown, takes in  
the whirl of birds diving around her,  
rosy breasted finches, flickers,  
juncos flying in to sing welcome, goodbye.

A line of clouds sleeps in the sky,  
old streambeds, long boat-shaped  
islands worn white,  
soft as old songs,  
far away –  
yet a woman's arms  
are as long as the sun.

An untethered grace comes.  
She reaches into the light, soars  
to become part of them, buoyant,

at once each thing, each one –