

HONEYSUCKLE

Momma made me go get a switch
from the honeysuckle bush
again today.

The first time it was because
I was playing doctor with Sarah
from across the street. We took off all

our clothes, even our panties,
so we could play with my new
doctor kit from my birthday.

It tickled when Sarah poked
me on my bottom with the shot.
We were giggling and rolling

on the grass when Momma came.
I picked the thinnest
branch I could find and pulled off

all the leaves. It stung my legs
like yellow jackets. Today, Momma
caught me playing doctor

with Davy from next door
and she hollered, "What
are you doing?" and I thought

she was going to cry
and she pulled my hand so hard
I left my doctor kit

in the yard all scattered.
This time, I pulled
a shorter branch that didn't whip

around so much and I left the leaves
on. Momma didn't like that.
She put her fist around it

and pulled it through her other hand.
Leaves fell all over the floor. Momma
switched and I danced, her hand

digging into my shoulder and me
trying to get out of that switch's
way. I cried and hollered,

Momma, don't, please Momma,
I promise I'll be good. Momma
says she wants me to be good

so when I grow up
I can be a doctor.

PREDICTION

She sits her own horse and wild things
watch. She would do well to learn
from them. But she sees only herself. There
behind scrub cedar, the coyote
halts. He knows the light child, the proud eyes,
the pony. He sniffs the air. Trouble
is like disappointment: you'd better pay attention.
He turns, a slow curve into mesquite trees.
There's nothing to be gained.

The child yells for help. She is a frowning child,
accustomed to rebuke, and stubborn. She would rather
get down by herself, but it is far to the ground
and cactus needles wait everywhere. A screech owl
screams, shrugs a wing and flies
to pecan trees near the river. Jack rabbits flop,
ears in sunshine, translucent, but the child will not listen.

Diamondbacks slide beneath a cattle guard
by the caliche pit. If they would speak to her, they'd warn,
look out for varmints, child. Be still and watch
the changes. Prepare to lose
your skin. It is in this way that beauty comes.

NOT RED

The field stood
in its light, shimmering
from root and leaf. This
is how it was, he slammed
the dash board and the car screamed
through cactus thorns. This moon
had known the women
of the thousand fires, breasts
and heavy bellies burned
by blame. This is how it was,
this no-blood moon, in her sixteenth
year, in a shining pasture, on a summer night.

E X I L E

School-green linoleum, cracked;
gunmetal-gray steel bed; flat
steel springs; a mattress:
thin, plastic, warped. No sheets,
no blankets, nothing he can use

to harm himself. He paces
like a leopard on the cool, hard
floor. He throws his body
on the bed—I cannot catch him,

hold him. His mouth slams
the headboard and he slumps
to the floor. Blood is on the tongue
he rolls in and out, chest pushes

against knees, arms hold on.
I like it here, Mom,
he says, blue eyes smashed deep
in his head look straight at me.

I like it here, and that's
the terrible thing. But you see,
they didn't remember
to take away his belt, or

cover the steam pipes
running across the ceiling.
And he didn't really
mean he liked it *here*.

THERE IS NO ORDINARY DAY

Do not regret the diapers, lean to the window
above the sink, catch a glimpse
of zinnia, flaming yellow. Do not regret
the sink, the diapers, the window's dusty screen, you were not
nearly old enough. Do not regret the mornings
without the leaning tree, think of willow brush along the draw.

Rise up among the trees, acorns when your child
was born, saplings when he died. Find stones to mark
your stories in the mountain laurel groves;
invite all wanderers to rest.

Remember washing diapers in an old chipped sink.
They whipped the line and smelled of cloud. Remember
bark between your toes, the branch you lay on,
balancing. Remember the child
who had a child and kissed his feet.