

Sotto Voce

Tonight blame Kiri Te Kanawa
infusing the kitchen with her aria,
blame the mixed bouquet of basil

and flayed tomatoes and onions
and one expansive high note blooming
like a rose in fast-frame.

Here in the audience,
even in middle age, a little voice sings
from the back of the auditorium

of my throat. Aren't all of us
waiting to be discovered?
Men and women enter the grand halls

of regional sales meetings
pressing nametags to dresses and ties.
I have been one of those people

entering hopefully, conducting
delicate exchanges in hotel rooms.
I have called those pale disclosures

my life. Blame the cheap seats
we bought in the balcony.
We barely hear the little cogs

in our own hearts. Mozart, they say,
heard entire operas in a moment—
second violins, a glaze of harp,

heroic voices in the chorus all
clamoring to be realized
at once. My genius may be small,

but sometimes truth rolls right at me
like a hard head of cabbage
and I see myself that suddenly,

draining the pasta.