

The Weight of Blood

Those years we were both on the cusp,
mine about to start, hers winding down.
I'd be brushing my teeth and she'd be peeing
and when she had her period
the smell of my mother's blood,
mineral and yeast, rose from the belted napkin.
Did she know I could smell it
as easily as I now smell myself every month,
the swift, nostalgic odor when I pull down my pants?
I like the smell, a little sexy, a little grimy,
but back then I could only say it was there.
We never spoke of it, of course,
and it's hard to imagine
I knew my mother when she was my age now.
These days I do all the driving when I visit her—
she gives me the keys, I tower over her,
but she still tells me where to turn.
I park as close as I can, then slow down
to walk at her pace. Her body is curved
as though caving. The cane is new.
The end of the block could be the other side
of the world, but I am happy
to make time hobble, no hurry
to get where it's going.

I never used to keep track
but every month now I record
the number of days between them.
The fact of blood on toilet paper
tells me I'm still on this side.
It's good our bodies don't ask permission
to loosen their grip, let drift off
what needs to go.
The chance to have children

is down to a trickle,
before long the blood itself will stop,
and at some point being a child,
having a mother,
will be over as well.
Yes, it's good our permission
isn't needed.
I'm fine being the grown daughter,
having an aging mother.
After that, what dark waits,
I would put off forever.