

The night swells around us.
 Our voices, tense with lightning,
 create a new silence.
 Tree frogs surrender their bows,
 crickets hush. Your shadow

emerges among the fireflies,
 soft-edged, reflecting the moon.
 I start, as if seeing you
 for the first time, ask myself:
 Who's the arrow and who's the swan?

THE FIRST DRINK

My mother stands in the doorway,
 always leaving. She thinks
 I'm a woman. Her face shows this—
 how odd. I'm four years old
 or less. The scene: Grandma's
 kitchen, my father, his lap, me.
 The choice: him or her. My heart
 empties soundlessly. I need her
 but she never touches me.
 The kitchen seems to shrink when she leaves
 like some hot air balloon dying.

Objects take on life like that:
street signs, trees. I hear everything
scream. I'm careful with everything.
The piano hurts when I touch it.
The glass angel feels lonely
when I leave the room. I can't bear
the cries of animals or babies.
I'm seven years old, careful
not to crease my communion dress
or bite the body of Christ. When they
say the word sin, I believe them.

Late October: I bleed for the first time,
ruin my Halloween costume.
I want to lay my head in my father's
lap, absorb his equilibrium,
but he thinks I'm a woman now,
screams at me to cover myself. His fear
is an undertow that drags him away. The years
grow between us like bad children.

I spend reckless weekends
before an eternal candle and gilded wafer
they call God, starve my flesh
to fine points, hard planes.
At sixteen, the first drink goes down
like a flame: purifying, hot.
I feel the answers flood my toes,
the promise seize my brain
like sunlight in a corner of hell.