

in some brand new country, the way the sky stayed lit
all night long and you lying beside me. The next morning
I told you about driving the chickens to the upper

pasture and we both laughed
because at that moment
it looked easy. I didn't tell you I couldn't sleep,

didn't tell you about the woman crying or the car
idling three stories down or the rain falling
all night. When you think of me, I want you to see me

sitting tall on the back of a tremendous, dark horse—
how easy I ride that horse
while my brothers and I, laughing,

herd 200 chickens into the upper pasture.
I want you to look up and see the white chickens
clucking through an acre of green—

400 white wings glinting in sunlight.
The chickens, dignified.
The children, beautiful.

WHAT WE DID WITH THE CHICKENS

After eating Moo Goo Gai Pan at a table with two women
we had never seen before, having heard about one woman's
heart condition and her husband's difficulty
with his neck, how it bent one way but not the other, then the other
woman
told of the dress she bought for her niece's wedding and why they
didn't
go skiing last winter, my daughter and I went out on the street
and stood staring into the window of a Chinese grocery.

There was a bin of pickled chicken feet as if the birds
had bit themselves at the leg where some trap held, then
hoisted themselves out of Chinatown where we stood
wondering how one could eat those feet
or the stripped gut of fish laid out in the bin next to the feet.
It would have been amazing to have seen that flock fly
up over Boston with their white wings
and legs with no feet, bare stubs
dangling down; awkward as chickens are
in the air, inept with their wings
even though they can run down roads
with no heads at the tops of their necks
delighting small children
and the boy with the ax.

The boy with the ax was my brother.

We had a barn full of chickens.

I thought it was all those eggs forming inside their bodies
kept them clumsy in air, the way they flapped so hard
when we chased them; fat like they had another world
lodged inside their bellies, a second kingdom
coming.

Clucking, their yellow beaks
clicked all day long. That sound rolled
through our sleep like water running as if someone
was informing us, whispering in our ears, "This is it,
this is it."

I thought the sound itself might one day be enough
to inflate the barn like a balloon, lifting the barn
and 200 birds straight up into the sky
and there would be no more
birds pecking at our feet, no more
standing in the cellar sorting eggs, cleaning
specks of shit off shells.

One night after a storm, there was a sound
in the trees made me think the barn
was shifting on its joints.

I thought I could hear 400 wings opening wide in the dark.

Sitting up, I could see each one of us
suddenly free, delivered like it was possible
to swallow so much air the body could float
out of any conversation—
straight up from the spot, see you later—
we'll talk about it—
good-bye.