

If Mercy Could Bear Its Name

At last, the leaves unlace.
In another month: blossoms. Petals
pale as hospital gowns. Through the window,
she conceives the harvest swift to follow,
her view of the yard clotted with thick-skinned
fruit, the road no more than a potion
of dust stirred by wind & distance.
From under the covers, a tiny voice
scuffs the silence and she recalls
again the doctor's warning: weeks, maybe
days, but she tries to think of only
the pears. How their shapes soon will dangle
like the bulbs above her daughter's bed,
the dimmest of three now a pale ghost
she later plucks from its socket,
the metal base curved inside her palm
still hinting at the fever that once pulsed
beneath a thin sphere of glass. Unbearable,
the way the room diminishes, clasping
shut, quieter somehow, shadows
shuffling like mourners, brushing shoulders
as they pass through. Few are the nights
she counts as good—emptied
of panic, choices, the frenzied dash
from bedroom to bathroom, bathroom
to bedroom, bile & Lysol a sour river spoiling
the air. Sometimes, as she traces
the veins mapping her daughter's smooth
& mottled skull, it's difficult imagining anything
so slight, so tender—a seed curled tight
inside the cracked earth of the room.

One more, she pleads, one more summer.
But how many lies must the living believe
before the hands know peace? Before
sorrow's small diversions add
to its failures? Like the daisies arranged
on the bedside table, jaundiced faces wilting,
already defeated. Or the kidney-shaped
stain that still haunts the living room rug. How
it never scrubbed clean, though she knelt
for hours, as if in prayer, leaning hard
into the stubborn fabric. Into a past
lost to exits & arrivals, the thud of boots
rolling through the whole house.
Their phantom procession loudest at night,
when the body finally begins to bow,
weary & seasoned, its limbs heavy
with each ripening grief.