

Suspira

A thousand years ago
according to the monks who spent three months
tracing the beak of a jackdaw in miniature
until it had the curve of all the letters on the page
all jammed together in an endless word
the bird was looking at but not reading
suspira named that longing
which would still be there
if every wish were granted

they made it out of *suspirare*
“to draw a deep breath”
they said it’s like a feather some small bird has lost
it wants to float or drift or rise
but always there’s a weight that comes inside
with every breath and breaks inside and grows inside
like weeds along these disregarded roads
that flower purple, rank, and unimpressed
until they fill and close down every single thing

to banish it, they wrote, breathe
until your ribs are granite
and you float inside your body
like a mote inside an empty church in August
when the sun has made the silence grim and vacant
then imagine dryness
then a dew, then rain, then streams with silver bodies
then big smirking devils, then inside the cloister
wolves and orphans sleeping in a pile
and dreaming of the mirror over everything
then see angels with big oversize hands

tall and skinny in a ruined city, wandering
with sacks for gathering and wind attentive at their heels
then see enemies in armor motionless
then rain again and hickory
then bread, blue ink, a wink of chrome
a sleepy cow's long glance
a pasture, dew again and spiders
the spiders with beautiful bellies
the one-eyed lady spiders just escaped
from some old Latin grammar
the kind they leave behind in smelly thrift stores
near the broken shoes and old relaxed pajamas
ones that hide a blue name
of some old man or lady little scared and ablative
then tall and smiling fading bending disappearing
now long gone
then see weeds, the kind whose weightless
drifting seeds the small birds love and crave
then one, that floats above the fence and rises trembling
over cities wolves and mirrors, toward a roaring sea
where every wish will go at last