

NARROW HALLWAYS

I.

Before the invention of glass,
time was not translucent. Mostly
it kept to itself, sleeping inside
the minerals that formed
below our restlessness.

Sometimes a volcano
spit out a fugitive star – it cooled
into obsidian, a window
we could neither repair nor
see through. But its arrows
taught us the meaning of distance,
the beginning and ending
of our skin, incision.

The body we could not see
was never colorless – *ghel* :
the root of amber, green or blue,
or may colorless be the harbor
of all ships except for red.
Inside the coming clouds –
sometimes we strung them
around our neck – is the memory
of sand, a narrow hallway
between the ocean
and the mountain. We warmed
our kettles on the cargo –
the ore we scraped from caves.
The etymology of glass,
an accident we dared not drink
became an empire.

II.

You unwind your mother's face
to look outside the window, her youth,
the swing that reaches its highest point
and slows, behind the door
that covers her lips, the cloth
of memory, so slow
it appears to stay there.

Behind the door is a room
you won't enter – bare
except for one wooden chair.
If it's the first or last day
of the year you will not see your mother,
for this is when she burns
the chair and builds another.
At night she bathes in ashes.

Your father laid the bricks
for this street until you could say
that you belonged here. Each one
flattens the ground into a book
whose story you learn to swallow.
A word is only so much ash
that rises from the street. But the clouds
keep shaking the pages
free from letters, the holes
we make in gravity, a body
upside-down.

III.

You travel far to be a face
inside the newspaper. Every month
I cut out the photographs
and lick them so their edges
stick together. Our windows

break so easily. I want to see you
without a caption – what I can't see
thickens. The sky
is the difference between
the third and second person.

You become the sky
until you can't, until the light
takes back your color, what it gave you,
until there's nothing but the stain.

On the last day of the month
it rains, how easily it breaks you,
but for a while you'll stay here.
You'll talk in your sleep,
and while I listen, I'll forget
my language, the way it divides
the outside into teams.

IV.

What we can't see thickens.
We mistake the air for interval,
a waiting room we harden and watch
as the contents of our breath
condense on its surface, our lungs
forever further from the water.

What separates the face
from the face behind the window?
Not distance, but time, which is maybe real
but see-through. When a rock
hits the glass, time cracks.
We measure nothing
until we first repair. Our eyes
compress the night into jelly
and so we mend the cracks
in glass, this looking, each morning,
a story of repair.