

THE POET VISITS ME IN SPRING

After the birds bed down
and the carpenter bees
come out to work, we drink red wine
on my porch. She says the moon
is moving fast as a racecar
though of course from here
we can't see it any better
than we can see the faraway
villagers drink from puddles,
step over the dead
fallen in their streets. The poet
tells me a story
about her terrible past,
but my mind circles around
that newborn lamb I saw
on a ranch last week. I can't stop it.
I keep seeing that little runt
wobbling up, bleating, tail wagging
as she scents the ewe,
only to be butted away again.
And again. The heftier twin
allowed the teat. And I'm thinking
it was the lamb's hope
that was hardest to see,
how each time she rose up,
she rose into the certainty
that milk would fall
like manna from the sheep's
undercarriage, its dark
and wooly sky.

Now, at dusk, the poet
compliments my garden
with its wild weeds
and bolting kale, and of course
she's right, it matters,
these brief explosions of seed
and the ripening of the petals
into perfume, even that runt

cast away to die,
while the living lamb walks
with the ewe through fields
of meadow barley and bleached
sheep bones shaken out like salt.

And of course the poet's baby
that died in an accident
too horrible to repeat—
that matters too,
the way the world can break
the twinned lives of a soul
too early, so that only half
stays here on earth,
while the other is set free,
though strung between them,
there will always be a line
troubled by their vacancy.

Perhaps that is how a door
like the moon opens
in the poet, where the dead
walk in, ask her
to pick up her pen.
I love how we both
believe it matters what we think
in a poem. Because
outside the kingdom of the page,
what can we do? How else

might her little boy and that lamb
find each other, while the moon
goes on speeding
to that faraway country?
How else pause the war
for one night, so the villagers
might slip from their cellars
into the glittered shatter
of stars? Just one night.

They've forgotten
how it feels to stand
under all this luminous
silence. To look
at the fine wool
that, for weeks now,
has fallen like snow
over their dead
to keep them warm.