

Packing For Ravello

We are packing for Italy.
I open closets and birds fly out.
A flock of albino wings rushes
my windows as if they remembered
their old address and appointments.
Where the diamond rings are, cash and credit
cards, pawn tickets. Imagine the complexities
of barter and theft camouflaged within twigs and string.

Identity is transitory, like a balcony in a rented house.

That's why we lock up our documents,
diplomas, drugs, certificates and passports.
They're our living autopsy, our proof.
We've got our guns and get out of jail cards
in there, our spare organs and the fuel required
to subdue agitation, balance mania and lethargy,
and induce sleep through the recurring dreams
we don't put on our resume. We cross borders,
order room service, masquerading as tourists
with cameras when we look like felons.

Meanwhile hallways fill with birds like an aviary.
Do you believe the robin guards her young
in the ill conceived nest in the porch eaves
when it's 104 degrees?
I've seen the eggs, translucent like the thin
opal skin of a woman doing twenty years.
I cracked them open. Hollow shells. Nothing.

My birds are leaving in a frenzy.
Strange, they didn't sing or mate or twitch
as the marina received sunset and the bay
was a vast gray mass grave, a fluid pewter
rumored to incite grief and amnesia.
My wily flock, pretending they were on Thorazine.

I assumed incarceration muted their confidence
instinct and skill. Or was it my thoughts leaking
like ink or oil stains that don't wash out?
Still, they were amusing as décor
touches go, and delightfully eclectic.

By Rome I'll forget this departure of birds

fat and white and animated as a plump Christian
woman's gloves when she gossips on Sunday,
her sealed fingers like a musical instrument,
an accordion you must keep hidden.
Or a chalkboard or paper fan.
Yes, she's a sea mammal with a teacup.

She's talking with her hands again.
My mother glared contemptuously
and father slapped me hard.
Only Jews and gypsies explain with their fingers.
You're not a symphony conductor.
You're not even human.

Venice will erase this exodus.
I will have fed pigeons in piazzas
and photographed sea birds on rocks.
My Italian is rudimentary. I can't carry a tune.
It's better to let cobblestones speak for me,
the marble, the brick and lime walls.
I'm certain there will be rain and bells.

Don't worry, darling. I've packed my pills.
I'll keep my mouth shut and my fingers
balled up tight as looted nests at my side.