

Cyclic

The odor was septic and made us speechless,
though we'd already lost our voices

when the sun napped dusk, when night's sheet
hushed the traffic, the birds, our thoughts.

It was a peahen hit to the ditch
and decaying. Her left wing shielded

her breast—a draped cape, her final
comfort. The smell of turkey is not

always the same. If we cooked her
carcass, would the scent remind us

of arugula, of berries brined? Of autumn
and wood fires, the late summer's chilled wine?

This find, this bird, we encountered
on an evening that made us question beauty,

was she messaging her last will and flight?
Her lofted feathers, those still sticking

to live twigs weighted with winter berries,
led us further still into the meadow

policed by the farmer's one black horse
and one banded cow. Land we did not own

but that owned our spirit in its ground
like all life its surface sends meandering.

Not listless in loss, but lustful for fresh
discovery found in failed crossings,

we crossed as wayfarers. We foraged
through paths in pastures of sorghum futures

and would-be whey. Our earlobes and nostrils,
every follicle of skin, set as seismographs

collecting fall rot and cyclic decay—any fresh
disturbance—in measurements of awe.