Traci Brimhall

ROOKERY

1. (N) COLONY OF ROOKS

Or ravens. Or crows. Related to the passerine order of birds. Family Corvidae. Kin to magpies and jays. Hatchlings fall onto bricks, and a woman buries them beneath the crocuses. She wonders why her husband doesn't come home. Why his fingers curl into questions. Why his hips are as brief and hard as June thunder her own body a chimney full of rain. One night she dreamed him in a basement stroking dead jackdaws and whispering someone else's name, and when she tried to brush his singed hair and ask why, he licked salt from her eyelids and whispered, *Don't look. The cradle is burning.* She awoke, and the bed was full of feathers. Black feathers. Hundreds of them.

2. (N) A BREEDING PLACE

Open nests of crows. Colony of seabirds. Harem of seals and their pups. Hawksbills bury their clutches and crawl back to sea. A mother and daughter walk the shore dropping starfish into a pail of vinegar. *It's unlikely they suffer,* the mother says. The daughter looks at her, eyes like wood wet with rain. The mother finds a pale, capsized Medusa, says, *The only immortal animal is a type of jellyfish. It matures and then grows young again. Over and over and over. It will live forever unless it's killed.* High tide brings the dead to shore auklet, fiddler crab, a school of herring. A blowfly circles and settles on a flounder, wings twitching, she sings to her eggs as they leave her body.

3. (N) A CROWDED TENEMENT HOUSE

Dilapidated. Packed. Rooms and rooms teeming with the crush of people waiting for the war to be over, to pull the world back out of the dragon's mouth. Pilgrims of blind alleys. Sojourners walking backwards into the future revising all the old myths. Blazing trails with graffiti of cinderblock saints, copyrighted love poems and prayers for apocalypse. There are dead oceans on the moon, a storm on the sun. The earth circles its star, one celestial body around another. One revolution. Two revolutions. Three. Four. And God comes down from the ceiling, bites the ears of everyone awaiting rapture, says, *I can't see you. Set yourself on fire.*