

Family Formicidae

Around her arms captured ants
streak like wire bracelets. Through the grass
and over the blacktop my stepdaughter
chases the elusive ones and delivers
them all into the withered jungle
of a mayonnaise jar.

*If I don't hurry they'll burn
their pinprick feet*

She hardly stops while I can barely start.
Eight months along, I've slung myself
in the porch swing, rockabye, rockabye
all afternoon lulled by the urgency
of this other one stretching inside me.
Now and then Katie will bend over me
magisterially and pat my broad belly.
This summer when we picked her up
she closed a doll in her shirt
and nursed it all the way
from Wisconsin. Now she's moved on
to livelier stories — entire clans swept
toward the totable heaven I hold on my knees.

*Go in there, in with your dead friends,
your crippled friends
and your really really live friends*

It's not revenge exactly
 which is never exact. It's that the sputtering
 wasp covets her clover tiara.
 The longtail skipper is laughing
 in the gladious juice. She assigns motive
 to the foamflower, scolds a roof
 of johnson grass for its flimsy design
 and shames the pill bugs,
 such dull armor. Come dark, the brilliant families
 rising from the lawn will be taken
 for their floating slowness.

*In this fist a fast fellow,
 in this a biter who's so mad at me*

What else would a god of insects be
 but small and stern and resolute?
 Clattering across the porch, she swoops
 in with another pair of soldiers,
 (yes, yes, she's saved some for the peonies.)
 Since she's a god, I'm another —
 swollen, inattentive, last
 audience for a miniscule soul. And again
 I offer my belly to her handspan, letting her
 take her measure of how this other
 jumps against her fingers,
 of how close the end must be.