

PEPONIA

Honeydew melons, swelling their shipping crates,
Kept cool in the damp cellar dark of my father's store:

Out of sight but never so far out of mind
That every so often a crowbar's iron talon

Couldn't pry open their plywood lids, suspending
The nails like fangs. If ripeness is all, it was all

In the way I saw the way my father cradled
Pepónia, turning them over slowly enough

To keep the luminous pallor of their moist
Complexions fresh: still bright in the long look back

Through the cellar dark. All in the way he'd never
Say what he saw, but set them gently back down

In their wooden crates. Then every so often another
Aura would hover there, in the afterglow

Of a dangling bulb's interrogating glare.
Which still can make my father's sisters appear,

Crouching together before a crumbling wall.
I mean in that black and white snapshot my mother kept

On her perfumed dresser, with its oval mirror.
And those open, kerchiefed faces staring back

From the open fields, late in the nineteen thirties.
As if a crowbar angled into the dark

Were leverage enough to release the fragrant, opulent
Sheen of those who never cross over the water

But hover near whenever I say *pepónia*:
Honeydew melons, swelling their shipping crates.

Just My Imagination

I was back in Winthrop, driving through the town
Where I grew up. The radio's off, but passing
By the brand new high school it's vintage Motown

Comes blaring through the Bose speakers in Neil
Shapiro's yellow Camaro. The top is down.
It's nineteen seventy-one. We're cruising the beach.

The great Temptations are singing as if they could drown
In the waves of what keeps running away with them.
I love the way they stretch out the crucial noun:

Imagin—a—shun. The girls on their towels are lying
Face-up or face-down. Their skin is golden-brown.
Neil is the president of the senior class

As well as the drama club. The sun is a crown
On his wavy luxuriant hair. Not one of our classmates
Is yet a shade in their underworld cap and gown

As Beauty walks by and he sings: I hear a tender
Rhapsody, but in—now slowing down—
Reality she doesn't even know me . . .

Then speeding up to flee her laughing frown.
But no fleeing Myelofibrosis. Mellifluous term
For the terminal cancer that never made a sound

As it pulsed to the tribal beat of his chosen blood.
And now there's no one around except the renowned
Smokey Robinson & the Miracles

Intoning their syrupy-scalding Tears of a Clown

They call Pagli—a—chi. Congenial Neil, as white
As a ghost as he waits for the vials to fill. The town

Conducting a blood-drive. The need for “Ashkenazi
Jews.” The Mayo Clinic. The Music of Motown.
The reel-to-reel cassette not yet obsolete.

The canvas top on the yellow Camaro is down.
We’re passing The Neil Shapiro Center for
The Performing Arts. He’s Emerson College bound.

BIRDS IN CEMETERIES

It must be the shade that draws them. Or else the grass.
And it seems they always alight away from their flocks,

Alone. It's so quiet here you can't help but hear
Their talons clink as they hop from headstone to headstone.

Their sharp, inquisitive beaks cast quizzical glances.
The lawn is mown. The gate is always open.

The names engraved on the stones, and the uplifting words
Below the names, are lapidary as ever.

But almost never even a chirp from the birds,
Let alone a wild shriek, as they perch on a tomb.

And then they fly away, looking as if
They couldn't remember why it was they came—

But were doing what our souls are supposed to do
On the day we die, if the birds could read the words.