

**Shadow**

*I always think they love me,  
she says when I ask why  
the forest dissolves into trees.*

She says, they're lost, starved for touch.

*So you're the grass bridge  
to their third world . . . I say,  
as if to visualize the process,  
. . . and that's how your back gets walked on . . . ?  
(I don't want to say *broken*.)*

She's drying the Chinese pitcher with the flowered linen towel,  
watching a swallow on the clothesline suck the dusk.

*No. I'm the space burning around them, the aftermath  
of a star . . . I ingest their emptiness, invisible and dangerous—*

She puts the pitcher down. The swallow flattened  
inside the Chinese pattern. I imagine the bird taking off,  
birches, banyans, baobabs  
holding the forest up.

*And it's a jungle not a forest she hisses from her cigarette.  
And I've tramped my way through the root mass,  
the metastasizing toadstools, and I don't turn back  
because it's rough—*

She balls and stuffs the linen towel  
into the empty pitcher,  
closes the blinds, crosses her arms—

*So why don't they love me?*