

Cynthia Day

MR. & MRS. CLOUD

Cloud. The Clouds. It *is* a funny name.
Your name will be Mrs. Cloud, my mother said.
That was thirty-some years ago and now he vanishes like one.
Joking aside, I can't remember him,
can't hear his voice, as familiar as cars in the street.
Sometimes I can see him in the driveway, the way he stood
when I was late, with his arms folded across his chest.
But I can't see him where I saw him every day
in the kitchen where we ate.

The children long ago moved away and now him;
things you don't expect although everyone tells you.
The house is quiet like a church.
You could say I pray over it:
the armchairs, Lizzie's clock, the pot of lavender.
What do I pray? To let go of the past
so the waste of a life, the lives, won't kill me.
To learn something, even this late.

MRS. CLOUD AND THE NEST

Last spring the robins built their nest
between the arms of two wicker chairs
I left side by side on the porch all winter
and it was, by their standards, as sturdy
as my old bungalow is to me;
twigs and grasses threaded
and intertwined with mud and wicker,
like clapboard, like nails.

I watched the lady settle in for her wait
as rain and ice swept the porch in April's bitter gasps;
and yield her azure eggs and sit with that inhuman look,
unpretending, so deeply into the present
it can't be understood. Day after day
I came back to the window, to her,

until cracks appeared in the shells
and her five babies lay naked;
until their down turned to feathers
and some messenger from the gods brought them,
one by one, to the edge of the nest
where they flew like crazy
to the porch railing, the trees.

And the whole time I was thinking
about the months and years it has taken me
to let go of a few offenses.

MRS. CLOUD AND THE BURNT ROSES

When Jack told the story at dinner
about asking a group of students
what love is, he said every
single one of them had an answer,
and I said it was the perfect example.
The suburbs are full of such
innocence. The women have
the kindest smiles.
Not like that old drunk
Mrs. Harding when her
husband left her; how she baked
roses in the oven and sent the
black flowers to his new house.