

Early Childhood

Hardly a thing I can hold in my hand.
But I recall my small hand
on the unpolished mahogany table
out on the sun porch where I sometimes
napped on the day bed, my hand
like the pokey part of a compass
when I'd circle the table
for a small eternity each day, hand
holding steady, I'd hum to my parents'
songs as they rose from the monophonic
console: dawn in a one horse town,
the lowing of cattle, yodeling solos.
It wasn't the music that kept me
moving but my own hand mesmerizing
myself, barely tethered to earth beneath me
or the desert outside where heat blistered
my father's roses. Inside and above me,
my big parents came and went
like the sun that ladled its light—
Imagining gold on the tips
of mountains, I had no words for
what lifted my vision there, groundless,
airy, clear—even then I leaned away
from the body's downward drop
where tears went when they fell
into dirt hidden by flowers where animal
bodies were buried. I knew *that* much—
I saw the Rangers shoot and shovel
under the coyote— so earth
wasn't comfort or warmth when I wanted
to purl my excursion into the music,
like the vapors of clouds, sailing
around the sky all day, nothing
to hold in my hand, just my hand
and those old songs,
circling lightly
in the dust on the table.