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Poems

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Poems

Abstract

Battery hens and Late Summer garden

Diane Fahey

BATTERY HENS

This is their provenance. This is their grave.

A cage roomy as a banquet hall, filled with row upon row
of cages, three hens to each. Heads, black-feathered,

red-combed, poke through wire down the hangar's length:
eye after identical, staring eye. As at a rest home,

sunblinds that can be raised for air. But not today.
In the green dimness, mounds of grey droppings multiply

like sponge: their only history — archeology of chicken
after chicken into hen — and their only product, except for

untold eggs and, at the end, their own numbed flesh,
its loss their one clear memory... But it is the sound

that wedges open the mind — so few ordinary farmyard
squawks above that low swelling surge: one corporate cry

hovering, pressing out into the day. A throatless bird
trying to sing; a wingless bird trying to fly.

LATE SUMMER GARDEN

The butterflies make no sound, seem always
to be travelling away from sight.

Copper and alabaster keys,
they have the freedom of the garden.

One quivers like a nerve
against my thumb's blue base,

its wings ragged and veined, pressed
like petals between clear leaves of air.

What nectar has sustained
that forthright orange, chameleon brown?

A dust of pollen radiates from where
the wings, almost unhinged,

touch the body haloed in dark hair.
The eyes of the wings

have opened and closed a million times.
Air quickens, drifts the butterfly down

into grass sewn with yellowed leaves
and buttercups — glossy, unfading suns...

Above, the bright fluttering green
of trees that have breathed and sung

with all the strength of summer.