

Margaret Gibson

an excerpt of

Second Nature


I began inside her body's dark room.
Wordless. Closely held. Fully met.
Her body the vault of all horizon.

Intimate sensing, within a camera
obscura. No alphabet—none but the syllable
Ah! that navel of awe through whose portal,

as through a pinhole in a window blind,
light enters the darkened chamber
and spreads on the unspoiled plane of a membrane

not yet split into body-mind. Pools there.
Reflects the luminous, the living world.
Hills of wild grass. Cedars. Rain. Sunlit

and moonlit wings. Migrant mauve and green and gold.




Wing-flash in the window light on wood—quick
spirit bodies fly through the sky of my table.
My mother's body lies beneath a wooden lid

and a casket spray of roses. The preacher
read, *I will lift my eyes to the hills*.
When my mother took the last, long sigh of breath

that could lift her to the crest of those far hills,
whose clouds are back-lit, reluctant—
I was holding her in my arms. As a child

I'd promised myself I would. Promise is pinion.
But when, at the grave, empty-handed, I turned away,
it was into the force that lives in things

I turned. Held now by a single bold gaze.



Not my mother's. She died with her eyes shut.
And they were closed in the casket, beneath
the flowers and smooth-planed oak and silken

interior, where she was now, in the dark
awaiting the deeper dark of the earth.
Turning from that dark, I was taken up

in the hawk's heddle of a gaze, the thread (in-
visible) between us tight. The gaze drew me
to it and held as you'd grip the haft of an ax

before striking. I was struck. Red-tails don't
perch low, I thought, wanting to look away,
the hawk too . . . intimate. *Accept the gaze,*

a voice within me chided. *Receive and maintain it.*