

*This and That*  
*for Coleman Barks, October, 2008*

LISA STARR

A while back you said, *You know, one of these days*  
*you're gonna have to write that poem about that deer,*  
and I agreed, even though there is nothing poetic  
about that night, nor about the way she tried  
so desperately to scale the stone wall in the stunned moments  
after I'd hit her, or she'd hit me,  
or however these calamitous intersections  
come together—nothing poetic  
about those time funny moments  
before both she and I realized she was broken.

She gave it four determined tries before resigning herself  
to the final taming, and like the dog does sometimes  
with one paw on the couch as if to say "I'd like to be up,"  
she raised one perfect hoof to the lichen-covered stones,  
and then just looked at them sadly. *Oh sweetheart,* I said,  
trying to ease her into a resting spot with me in the wet grass.  
*Oh, sweetheart,* I said, over and over again.  
Oh, how the spasms rippled down her long, strong side,  
relentless. Oh, how her body shuddered  
as the gorgeous living left it. Oh, how I held her, weeping,  
and how she forgave me, and how all the silent eyes  
of the night birds and night animals forgave me too.

It's been nine months since then and I can't find  
the notebook with the specifics,  
like the particularity of the thwack  
on the windshield, or her slow-rolling thud onto the hood  
of the car. So I understand; I know I've got to get to it,  
and get it right, and especially not forget her nostrils,  
flaring hopefully in the familiar grass when everything else,  
at last, had mercifully stopped moving, nor her heartbreaking  
look of puzzlement as she lost recognition of even that.

And then, last night at dinner—across the table  
your eyes and your face suddenly wet with tears.  
*What is it?* I asked. *I don't think I'm ready to die yet,*  
you said, *I mean, ever,*” and you looked up and around  
at a room filled with people we didn't know,  
dining in a place we'd never been before.  
And it was difficult to swallow then, and it was hard  
to speak, and I knew right then that I was ready  
to write this poem about that deer.