

last summer

you're shaken only in private when
you learn your mother dies, seven
thousand miles away. at night, you

retreat to the bedroom to cry.
in the morning, you pretend
the coffee's sweet enough, the birds

loud enough. i begin to notice eurasian
collared doves in the bright spaces
of afternoons. i just learned their name

so i see them everywhere, their black
bowtie half-wrapped around the neck.
i don't know how to wring sense

from the muddy cloth of our lives.
they should have been mourning doves
dotting the telephone poles and poinciana

limbs outside the condo, they could've
cooed at golden hour to let you know
there's some meaning to it, this hurt.

sometimes when i open the bedroom door,
the doves gone to sleep, the owls
somewhere else, you let me rub your back.

there is an aldabra giant tortoise named jonathan

who is 190 years old. jonathan lives in the british territory of st. helena in the south atlantic which was once a place where napoleon lived and died in exile, but is now a place where jonathan, the oldest known living animal on the planet, lives. there is a photo of jonathan from 1886. you can google it right now. jonathan has lived so long that cataracts have clouded his eyes, his sense of smell disappeared years ago. he won't leave his mate's side, though, whose name is fredrik, aged 32, who was once thought to be *federica* until researchers confirmed his sex. jonathan's other mate, emily, is in her fifties. he loves according to how a mate's shell feels against his. other petty things don't matter, he has decided, as old folks often do. jonathan's many lovers have lived and died while we built cities, razed them, erected skyscrapers, threw children into cold streets. this isn't a poem about age or jonathan's memory, which goes back farther than most nation states. i just wanted to let you know that a two-century old pansexual tortoise named jonathan is still alive somewhere on this same planet, where we toil for a little bit of time. i thought this might help make sense of things. i thought it might make you smile.

least bittern

you spot it first, a least bittern
piercing through the swamp's edge,
slightly larger than a robin, a pin-beak
designed for the quick kill. a heron

of diminutive stature. black-mohawk,
forest-floor plumage. i've never seen
one before, but i've been good today,
identifying the great egrets, wood storks,

a night heron which was certainly
a night heron despite the insistent eyes
of another birder who called it a limpkin.
not even close. there was the roseate

spoonbill, more pale than bright pink,
a great blue heron on a pond apple island,
the tricolored herons fishing by the monster
gator laid out across the walking trail,

and the glossy ibis, iridescent and proud
to be such a remarkable ibis, of course
anhingas splaying wet wings in the sun,
of course common gallinules which i called

moorhens, their closest cousins, and a pair
of black-bellied whistling ducks pretty
as paintings you'd find in a hunter's cabin.
we don't stop talking all day, old friend,

like the wood storks honking in their nests.