surely i am able to write poems
celebrating grass and how the blue
in the sky can flow green or red
and the waters lean against the
chesapeake shore like a familiar
poems about nature and landscape
surely but whenever i begin
“the trees wave their knotted branches
and . . .” why
is there under that poem always
an other poem?

—Lucille Clifton
Sorrow Home

BY MARGARET WALKER

My roots are deep in southern life; deeper than John Brown or Nat Turner or Robert Lee. I was sired and weaned in a tropic world. The palm tree and banana leaf, mango and coconut, breadfruit and rubber trees know me.

Warm skies and gulf blue streams are in my blood. I belong with the smell of fresh pine, with the trail of coon, and the spring growth of wild onion.

I am no hothouse bulb to be reared in steam-heated flats with the music of El and subway in my ears, walled in by steel and wood and brick far from the sky.

I want the cotton fields, tobacco and the cane. I want to walk along with sacks of seed to drop in fallow ground. Restless music is in my heart and I am eager to be gone.

O Southland, sorrow home, melody beating in my bone and blood! How long will the Klan of hate, the hounds and the chain gangs keep me from my own?
What More?

My lawnmower has awakened the resident god of my yard
who rubs its leafy hand in anticipation
of troubling me again with one of its cruel koans.

this one a small bird dropped
from the sky, or thrown out,
out of the sweetgum tree

where I was cutting
that long triangle of grass outside
the back fence: put there

when I wasn’t looking, it lies
on its back twitching half in and out of the swath
I cut a minute before.

I’m being tampered with again,
like an electron whose orbit and momentum
are displaced by the scientist’s measurement

and observation. If I’d found something already stiff
and cold on the ground
I’d have kicked or nudged it out of my path:

but the just-dead, the thing still warm,
just taken its last breath, made its last
movement, has its own kind of horror.
Urban Nature

Neither New Hampshire nor Midwestern farm, nor the summer home in some Hamptons garden thing, not that Nature, not a satori -al leisure come to terms peel by peel, not that core whiff of beauty as the spirit. Just a street pocket park, clean of any smells, simple quiet—simple quiet not the same as no birds sing, definitely not the dead of no birds sing:

The bus stop posture in the interval of nothing coming, a not quite here running sound underground, sidewalk’s grate vibrationless in open voice, sweet berries ripen in the street hawk’s kiosks. The orange is being flown in this very moment picked of its origin.
Postcard to an Ecologist

Last year
I heard tell
a striped snake
crossed the sandy road
where grandma lives.

Walking
the humid farm today,
I saw that striped snake
crossing the sandy road
where grandma lives.

And when tomorrow comes,
I will wait with my garden hoe
for that striped snake
who crosses the sandy road
where grandma lives.