

Kim Addonizio

In the Land of the Free

The ants are mopped from the kitchen floor.
Peaches sweeten in the pie shell in the oven,
and the promised check just arrived in the mail.

I'm a little tired, glad to be inside
on a day of bright sun. I'm glad I'm not toiling
under the earth in filth and darkness somewhere.

Neither am I waking in a tent
to mud and black flies, trudging forward
in line for a handful of rice. Not for me

the burning unreachable itch inside the skull
from toxins released into a river, not
my child born without benefit of a brain

in sight of that river, its brown, sluggish passage
of tree limbs and chemical sludge.
Here I only see the back yard

of lemons and rosebushes,
blackberry vines, dropped avocados.
The dishes done and put away,

the living room straightened, fresh-cut flowers;
the cat asleep on her back, showing her white,
caressable belly.

Feeling Bad

I picked up my harmonica and played,
sounding like something so feeble and pain-wracked
I felt terrible about what a misshapen, encephalitic creature

my passion for music had produced.
Then I read the morning paper: first the front page,
the usual menu of harrowing suffering

served up by the greedy and powerful chefs
who continue, each generation, to entrench themselves
in the world's vast, gleaming kitchen.

Next, a tribute to all the notable people
who died this year—how terrible
I'm not notable, was my first thought, followed by,

how depressing that I, too, am going to die,
and finally, how sad to lose each one of them.
By now, as you can imagine, I was feeling pretty low,

and it was too early in the day to start drinking
without some kind of elaborate self-justification
I didn't feel up to. So I reached

for my harmonica again, an instrument
the great Robert Johnson played so badly
no one would jam with him until he abandoned it

for the guitar, and I breathed in and out
through a single hole, and called it my blues,
which made me feel better until a few dark clouds

rushed over to deliver a cold, heavy rain,
and I began to give serious consideration
to the apparent indifference of nature.