

Memory of a Year with Allusions to the Greeks

When I had company, it might have been
the classicist who sat with me—
he would have called that year *cloud-cuckoo-land*.

We worked in a place of claw and pinion. Beak.
Outside, a shadow bird was cawing
on the branch, all signs gesturing at catastrophe.

Some ancient playwright said
Grief's an avalanche whose weight we cannot stop,
of course, I'm paraphrasing here.

We rolled boulders to a hilltop.
We commiserated in the maze of our small suffering,
The Greeks would have named the classicist *kind natured*.

He told me once he hated
how that year had smashed the clay of him,
breathed anger in his lungs.

Beyond my window, the great green lawn remained
indifferent, and in the warmer months,
students drowsed on towels, golden figures in the light.

And then, sudden as a crane that lowers gods onto the stage,
the classicist and I were both leaving, a strange departure
from the mythology. We were leaving

even the monster of that year—the many-headed one
so hungry it would feed upon its own serrated self.
I don't remember our goodbye.

I hope somewhere he's still explaining
what the Greeks believed about pain, how the body keeps on
bleeding and we spit the poison out.

That snake-bitten year—I'll strike it
in revenge for how it wounded us. I'll string the bow.
I'll send the arrow through a dozen iron rings.