

## I See You

I wake up in the City Invincible  
with a rock pigeon perched on the wall sconce  
above my front door. Strangers call her  
*a rat with wings*, but I have named her Stone.

Fed her corn, seeds, and bread.  
Studied her flock. Shared a roof with her squabs  
who sing at night under the light of a just moon  
where birds claim the front porch

every window ledge and humans claim  
the block, every revamped room,  
even those abandoned crevices  
with planks of wood. No knobs or hinges—

gateways to our hood of unnamable places.  
But we christen our homes and our kin  
create sounds and signals that go beyond  
the thresholds of this city, and we give

ourselves permission to build  
right where we are and no matter how far  
we travel away from this nest, and no matter  
how long the journey, we return

with a nod that says, *I am here.*  
*If anything disturbs this space,*  
*I have acknowledged the row*  
*of faces in this community.*

*I see you.*

To the women who lean over  
porch railings like wilted petunias  
and hum tunes from Stevie's *Hotter than July*  
as three children eat ice pops

and dance like marionettes under  
flood lamps, I know what you have  
lived through on and off these streets.  
This nod solidifies our unity.

To the mom who swaps sugar, gossip  
and hyssop tea, shops in her neighbor's  
closet like it's the Cherry Hill Mall  
and hops two buses to see one movie,

To the dad in the stained apron  
whose cherry hands shoo away hornets  
and scoop water ice with a *God Bless and Amen*  
to put his five kids through private school,

I see you.

To the couple with canes, khaki slacks,  
and silver fros who hobble  
to the laundromat, market, and  
doctor on the other side of town,

To the entrepreneur who works  
the night shift at Shoprite, takes classes  
during the day to earn his GED,  
and owns a detailing shop,

To the student who pawns  
her wedding ring, watch, and pearls  
to pay college fees and takes  
14 years to complete a 4 year degree,

To the swat team  
that moves with stealth and grace—  
Black head to toe. Black front to back  
down the alley behind Washington Street,

and to the girl from Cramer Hill who builds  
a relationship with her dad through snail mail,  
collect calls and picnics at Bayside where  
she can't wear shorts, flip-flops, or caps,

I see you.

I know what it is like to feel safe and unsafe  
makeshift locks on my bedroom door.  
I, too, have been afraid behind brick  
and shades, I see you.

You are the one with radiant gold,  
ruby, and razzmic jewels  
the color of iridescent plumes.  
The most powerful flier of all birds.

You have rescued people. Rode on  
wide wings of resolve. Left and returned  
like Cher Ami to the same door.  
Not unscathed from the history

you've made back and forth across the sea.  
Message bearer. Carrier of words. I see you.  
Invincible. Unconquerable bird of the city.  
Do you see me?

*Shawn Regina Jones*