Flying Lesson

By Dolores Hayden

Focus on the shapes. *Cirrus*, a curl,
   *stratus*, a layer, *cumulus*, a heap.

*Humilis*, a small cloud,
   *cumulus humilis*, a fine day to fly.

*Incus*, the anvil, stay grounded.
   *Nimbus*, rain, be careful,

don’t take off near *nimbostratus*,
   a shapeless layer

of rain, hail, ice, or snow.
   Ice weighs on the blades of your propeller,

weighs on the entering edge of your wings.
   Read a cloud,

decode it,
   a dense, chilly mass

can shift, flood with light.
   Watch for clouds closing under you,

the sky opens in a breath,
   shuts in a heartbeat.

Source: *Poetry* (April 2014)