

## On Remodeling

I want a carpenter. No, not  
Jesus. He's too busy for house calls.

But someone like him, with miracle hands.

I have an itemized list of  
things that need to be fixed, carpenter.

First, build me a bookcase out of  
white birch—sand it until it gleams and  
  
paint dark flowers and vines along its shelves.

Perhaps you can also take a  
ladder up to my roof to replace  
  
broken shingles that have let the rain in.

Until you can build a new one,  
stick a book under the trembling tilt  
  
of my left foot. It makes me lopsided.

I want its replacement to be  
wood, the hard kind—pine or white maple  
  
or oak, to finally make me sturdy.

Now, about the teeth—blunt them. Please  
sand down the edges. Build a cage  
  
around my mouth to protect my nails.

Next, the spine—I want it straightened  
from its strange, uncomfortable bell-curve.

Unknot the mess of my gut—that cramped, grey,

tangled worm—but you have to do it  
patiently, or risk making it worse.

It takes time. It will get your hands dirty.

The last thing is the hardest, but  
also the most important. String up

fairy lights in the hollows between my

ribs. Let them illuminate all  
those dark spaces—the wing-spread of lungs,

the hum of thrumming heart: beating, beating.

## Rabble

A monarch perches on a skull's  
empty eye socket, fiber straw  
legs grasping at cool, solid bone.

Veined, velvet wings beat once, then twice,  
a lady's fan sweeping or  
a blink of tiger's eye.

It keeps its eyes open: faceted,  
taking in the fractured landscape  
with the hunted's attention. Winged rabbit,

desperate to cling but  
always ready to flee or

rise up with a hundred thousand  
brothers and sisters, a unified swarm  
of wings, less destructive than locusts,  
but no less massive, to

fly south, to warmth and remembered  
safety that hums in their hindbrains.

Their only impediment—  
the ghost of a mountain, long crumbled to dust,  
forces their great cloud to  
part, river-like, around empty sky.

Monarchs don't know they'll never finish the migration.  
Their parents left the road-map, but not  
the destination. Instead, they will land in Mexico,  
amongst celebration, and in the boroughs of raspberry or  
mango plants, lay their star-clustered eggs on the  
underside of green leaves before

they die, journey half-finished.

Their children will finish what they began,  
rising up, as their parents did, in  
a kaleidoscope, a flutter, too restless to stay  
even in that warm place. Embedded with  
thousand-year instinct and built to escape,

they will be born with that fear, that  
constant movement—an inborn Sisyphus-cycle,  
circling the world again and again.

They will know it in their spine, tiny, sticky feet;  
thudding heart, tremulous body.

## Notes on Building Human Beings

Start with the bones. You need bones for human beings—first the thickness of the femur, the wishbone tibula-fibula. Move on and upward: illum, sternum, shoulder girdle, zygomatic and frontal bone. Set each knotted joint of the spine in place, one by one. Don't let it curve.

Go back to fill in the details. The fan spread of ribs—count to twenty-four—the delicate hinges between the phalanges and metacarpals of the hands, the feet. Fill them with marrow, thicken them, let them sit for seven days and seven nights. Humans need to be sturdy.

(If you have spare clay, some dirt, add it to the bend of the patella, the scapula.)

Knit together muscle, sinew, nerves. Give them organs: the odd pear of spleen, wing spread lungs, coiled snake gut, grey and pulsing. Pack them in tight: there isn't much room, and humans need so many to function. The last to go in is the brain, the tongue, the heart. Set them aside for later.

(Add the appendix for fun. And to teach them even useless things can be dangerous.)

Add skin. Smooth it over the bones, the mess of organs. Be a construction worker smoothing over new concrete on the sidewalk. Don't let anyone step on them, or you'll risk leaving an impression that won't come out. They hold impressions so easily. Be loving. They'll hold that in them, too.

What's missing? The most essential thing: first you must go to a tall mountain and wait until everything is silent around you. Exhale. Do it again, in a bottle. Bring the bottle down the mountain with you and hold the lips to the lips of the human, let them kiss. Make them drink deep. Historians will call this the breath of life, but it's simple science, really.

You can take out the brain now, the tongue, and the heart. No human is complete without them. Knit the tongue in, bless it with speech. Settle the heart in the ribcage, sequestered away as a cloistered monk; massage it with your fingers until it thumps. Finally, the brain—hinge back that frontal bone and place the brain in gently, so gently. Watch, breathless, for the damning blink of eyes, a dreamer woken from a long sleep.

(If you pray, pray. Your thing of darkness has come alive, and may need the guidance.)