

Rabble

In the middle of Lake Superior, there is a
ghost mountain whose ancestor stood
impediment to flutters of

monarch butterflies flying south for the year.
And though the mountain is long
dead, the monarchs' great cloud still
parts around that empty space, river-like, as

they fly to the remembered warmth
and safety humming in their hindbrains.
They know they won't finish their migration, but they
still weave around the ghosts of other mountains,
long-dead forests, forgotten canyons, landing

in Mexico only days
before Día de Muertos.

The Aztecs looked at the black, open
eyes in monarch wings and named
them spirits of the dead. Tiny ghosts,

they rest among boroughs of raspberry and mango
plants, gifting star-clustered eggs
on the bellies of translucent green leaves
before dying, relieved, in that warm, safe place.

Their children will crawl into the world
encoded with escapism, restlessness
built in their twitching antennae,
tiny, sticky feet,
thudding heart and tremulous body.

Winged rabbit—desperate to cling,

but always poised to flee.

Look: one perches on a skull's empty eye
socket. Veined, velvet wings beat
once, then twice:
that slow blink of tiger's eye and amber.

Six fiber-straw legs bend at the ready,
grasping cool, solid bone. Eyes
always open—faceted, fractured,
watching the world with the hunted's attention.

Tiny Thing

The crushed bird on the sidewalk, smaller than my palm,
has its beak open to the sky. Tiny thing. Gray now, after three days,
crushed into bone pulp and sinew, but its feather might have been blue, once.
The hopping brown pigeons down the street wouldn't recognize it.
I barely do, only stopping to step around at the last second,
stomach-dropping abjection filling me like an oil spill. I hate to see
dead birds. I always look away, like they need privacy. I step primly around them,
and escape trying to erase their corpses from my memory.
It's not just the meat-and-gristle grisliness of an unclean death—
it's the pitifulness. Aloneness. Left to die-ness.
In the space between recognition and avoidance, my soft
heart aches for that crushed bird. Dying on the sidewalk, left to rot.
Not even in a green place, where rot can become life again,
but on cold concrete, where nothing grows and corpses are left
for the sun to pick clean. For more people to step on, instead of around.
Tiny thing, once-upon-a-time blue bird: you deserved better than that.

The Dentist

My dentist appointment is in an hour and
I have to go—my teeth ache. I made it
four months ago, a few weeks before you died
and the shell you inhabited was swallowed into
inky earth.

I can't call. The phone and I are enemies, these days.
It rings to remind me of the world and I, wise to
the perils of befriending the enemy, ignore it.

Besides, what would I say?

I'm sorry I can't make my appointment;
I lost my heart. I'm sorry,
but even my teeth miss her and I can't stand
to expose them to harsh light. No human eyes
should witness them. I'm sorry,
but my home is now in the warm,
soft quilts of my bed where I am
entombed as in the womb.

(I dream of existing before infancy,
when heartbreak and
tears and grief were not yet born.)

I could say that. I could pick up the phone and
tell the sweet-faced secretary the fog has
subsumed me, and when I will emerge, cleansed, is
anyone's guess.

I don't. I put on my jeans. My unwashed sweater.
I go to the dentist.

to the boy who reached for me with both hands

You reach, feather-fingered,
to cradle my heart in your
unblemished palms, but

I am not a person. I am a
war zone, walking.

Bones dense with land mines;
tears, more gas than water.
Those breasts? Ticking grenades.
I have an atom bomb

heart—one wrong touch and
we both go up.
I believe in taking my enemies with me.

I warned the ones who came before.
They thought that if they rained down fire
I would be baptized: instead,

I burned.
They left me spiderwebbed,

stuttershook.

I'll give you what you need, not
what you want: the truth of me.
I am lacuna, that avaricious maw
yawning,

hungry.
So reach, if you want.

Your touch may bloom

galaxies or birth stars but
you won't make a garden out of me.

Notes on Building Human Beings

Teeth first. Blunted, not sharp.
Killing is too easy for them, anyway.
Bones should follow: femur, scapula,
illum, zygomatic, sphenoid, wishbone tibia-fibula,
all the knotted, tender vertebrae.

Detail work comes next. Caged ribs,
delicate hinged phalanges, metacarpals,
the all-important interphalangeal joints.
Fill them with marrow. Thicken for
seven days and seven nights.
Humans need to be sturdy.

(If you have spare dirt,
add to the arched patella.)

Knit together muscle, sinew, nerves.
Drop in organs: the odd pear spleen;
wing spread lungs; coiled snake gut: gray, pulsing.
Pack tightly. They need them all—
except the appendix. Add that for fun, and to teach
them even useless things can be dangerous.

Brain, tongue, heart—no human is complete
without them. Set aside.

Skin, blooming and luscious. Smooth it carefully
over the messy organs, the sturdy bones. Bind your
love to their downy hair, feathery eyebrows.
They'll remember.

Knit the tongue in, bless it with speech.
Settle the heart in the ribcage, cloistered
as a monk; massage until it thumps.

Finally, the brain—hinge back the frontal bone.

Set it down.

Gently. Gently.

(If you pray, pray.

Your thing of darkness has come alive,

and may need the guidance.)