

Buried Song

Wrapped in moistened cloth &
buried under the loam that cradles
the coast redwoods is a song.

The roots of the bay laurel are chaotic
ceilings, reflecting the lyric back
on itself in infinitely recursive singing.

A dancehall underground shadowed
by understory, the bigleaf maple &
the tanoak & the mule deer grazing.

Those of us who never knew about
the song are unable to grieve. Never
realizing what was forgotten.

There is a traveling show, ghost performers
in a buggy drawn by spectral quarter horses.
They sing a memory of the song's recycled echo.

We chase the scent of soil they leave
behind, always a town away, a morning
too late. Searching for the map to the song.

Elegy with Bread & Honey in a Cage

Four & twenty blackbirds were baked
in my chest. The scuttling claws
marking the years, a Gregorian calendar

with lines of drawn blood. Sometimes
they slept. No counting house, no bread
or honey. Bottlefuls of rye. I moved

them to a cage swinging behind
my ribs. Sometimes they slept.

She might have once been a wren,
her eyes the color of sage,
then grey as river stones. Perched

on an aspen branch after escaping
the bones of my body.

Prelude to the Orchid Pavilion, Peonies, & Butterflies

My daughter, lion-shoed, nods
her head at the Chinese jade mountain,
jade tea cups floating along a jade river.

A jade butterfly wrenches first one
celadon wing then the other from
a still tree & leads us to a woodblock print

of peonies, lands briefly out of reach,
lifts off again, dredging ink to rise,
wings drooping as if air were heavy as mud.

We run to catch the butterfly, watch
the dark wings explode through a canvas, tuck
elegantly together, emerge the color of chorion.

I tell her the story of Henri Charrière, floating away
from a Guyana prison on a bag of coconuts,
the butterfly tattoo on his sternum flying ahead.

When his coconuts docked in Venezuela,
he was imprisoned again. Nine times
he attempted escape. To give

his daughter a gold ring fashioned
into a butterfly with a blue sapphire diamond
embedded in its aureate chest.

Immense Sky

Eyes full of magpies, wingful, pulling
sky together, gathering
the world & arranging
the glittering pieces on shelves
in a cave. A murmuration of collectors,
beak-curious & taloned, pushing
the clouds, fashioning a silver bell
from tinfoil & a song, leaving
a music box in a letter drop. All those wings
& souls, all that terror, all that
beauty found & loved & made & given.

Biophilia

Catch me up. How many years
since the last visit
to my soul? Fireflies
the night my mom left herself.
There & then not there
in a rented bed.

A summer day
looking for milkweed & thistle
in a ditch near the farm
where I grew up. Filling
my pockets
with horn-shaped pods
hoping butterflies
will follow me
home.