

Mythology

After all these years & halfway
around the world on this deck
where I'm sitting at home

in the sun & can see that some
newly hatched insect has chewed
& chewed the lips of the just

sprung Irises I've been growing,
the axis tilts & sways the
ground or whatever it is I am

standing on now below
my feet, not a ship
to go through like a business

of ferrets, but a bus
that I'm riding again
through a city on the other side

of the planet, crowded, so
crowded in fact
that I'm holding on

to the strap & rocking
in the absent-minded way
one does when commuting

to work in stockings & dress
with all the rest that we know
but don't change about pay,

since it's abstract & given
in exchange, compensation
for what it is you did

today & today by the piece
or, in my case, as temp
by the hour, in some

unknowable nowhere
devoid of the body, only it was
my body brought me back

to the bus, my breast
to be exact that some man
was cupping, reaching around

from behind & it took me
a minute to feel the pressure
like stiff copper

armor strapped on
for a battle & then
to feel the silence

of all the other passengers
hushed & waiting, a sound
like a hundred little bites ticking

within each second & still
the fact goes by
too fast, the man's hand

on my breast & you
reading these lines
to the moment when

I never even slap the man,
just turn & glare & pry
his fingers from my flesh

as if gently loosening
a bulb with a cultivator
all these years later & half-way

around the globe, where I
am a goddess with a stick
sometimes, I do a lot of smiting

in the garden where I thwack
& smash the beautiful backs
of the grasshoppers then bury them

alive with the point
of my stick into a quick hole
of a grave, below topsoil, since

their teeth remind me
of the knives kings used to wield
when getting to the business

of cutting out the tongues
of all the women they desired
after—

Track

Nearly invisible & crosscutting the narrow path
like a whisper carved in dust, in dusk, a phantom
map of some predator as it passed
here, a trace the younger girl almost erases
with the zigzag design
from her shoe & the swerve of her shoulder
brought to a halt by the outstretched
arm of the older woman, bracing,
warning of danger hidden in the manzanita
grove's ochre laced with poison oak.

Where is my biologist friend with his studied ways,
or would he simply shrug at this track
since he's been witness so many times to the actual
bobcat or cougar in the grass,
or would he believe
the elusive hint cause for my maternal pause
equipped to do little but point out the pattern
of prowler & prey before it turns shadow
again & he'd be scoffing at my choice
of October for this late walk with my daughter
in the most active time of the day.

And the two of us stand
in this drought-ridden state
together at the outline, the evidence,
a mother taking note of the burnished leaves
forcing their way up the thighs of desiccated trees

nearby & a girl, learning for the first time
some nocturnal female sense
that feels like snakes inside the flesh
& still how to keep the body
from squirming.

Squirrels of North America

From grab to flit, from clutch to twist, through leaf
twitch to the wind's acoustic shifts, in parks, in yards,

one played in the shade below a picnic table, belly
down, arms out like a kite trying to fly from summer

heat & ash that blackened the nostrils of every breathing
thing in the vicinity of a swamp in flame. Metal grommets

flashed round the table for any passing eye & teenage
conversation turned to armadillos flattened on blacktop

but still rumored to have armor strong enough to deflect
a bullet. Trails went winding off into pine woods

with no summit, country flush for miles & I disappeared
down one of those paths with a nice enough guy & a web

hung above the brambles, particles of cinder clinging
to its outline, & I trusted being this far in with no other

ear to hear me. The boy said then, *You know, you should be
more careful*, & his words spread a blanket over my young

face to shield the stunned animal & a knot of hard
acorn lodged in my throat & I swallowed & swallowed it

down. I was safe, but only for now. The boy took
my hand, later, by the fire & fastened his fingers to mine,

the group singing some tune passed down through years,
& I kept silent, eyes fixed on the coals as tiny claws

gripped bark just beyond the frame of light, from grasp
to hide, from lash to flight, something wild gone dark.