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 splayed 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.