

Lark

A stone lodged in the boy's throat.
Why had he even taken it in his mouth?
Hard to remember now—something

about its smell, like rain. Something
about the open field, a distant song,
a sense of the day's never-endingness.

On a lark, his mother would say.
He'd moved the stone inside his cheek,
along his teeth, pressed it against

the roof of his mouth like candy,
though it tasted of dirt and ozone.
It was hard to imagine being *on* a lark—

such a small thing. The size of his fist,
though finer boned. In the story his mother
read when she used to read to him,

birds were caught in branches painted
with glue. The birds would settle
and then exhaust themselves battering

against the air that wouldn't open
to them anymore. He imagined
plastic bags snapping in wind.

And now he felt like a tree filled
with larks, his whole body branched
with panic, lashing and lashing.

Meadowlarks lived in the field, he'd
seen them skitter in low arcs away.
Not true larks at all, though

it was hard to think of them as a kind
of blackbird with their yellow chests
and brown-stippled backs.

Still, that's what his book said
when it mattered to him once.
Who named these things? How

did they mistake so much?
He didn't like his own name—
something an old man would be called.

His parents were old. The day
felt old. His mouth tasted
like the ringing inside a bell.

And how little he filled his name,
the only one he'd ever own—
it strained away from him. Beyond,

names drifted the field, billowing,
unattached, catching briefly on shocks
of broken grass, a raised lip of stone.

Actaeon's Hounds

And then I wasn't myself anymore. A heaviness
branched from my head, not like thought, or worry,

but solid, forcing upward, pressing against my brow,
wedging itself between me and the world. The weight

swung with me when I shook my head, clattered
against a limb above. Nothing could dislodge it.

And the woods thrummed as though a skin had broken
from over my ears to let in what had always been muffled.

Wind wrestling through the pines. Branches mourning
against each other. The skirring slang of birdsong.

Everything thrilled and fretted into new sound.
Even the dogs rushing through the far trees, I heard it all—

footfalls, twigs snapping their faces, one dog breaking into a bay,
then another. My dogs. I knew them. Loved them.

And I knew they would know me, dogs I once
stroked mindlessly next to the fire, though now I had no hands.

Dogs that tilted their ears when I spoke their names,
that came to me when I called, that recognized me

even when I stumbled against them in the night. But now
those names I'd once slant easily into rhyme, into song,

into endearment, slipped sideways, beyond me,
shadows flitting illegibly through the woods.

And a scent ached the air, honing itself, sharpening.
They were coming. I meant something else to them—

flesh straining against teeth, a hot wealth of blood
pouring free. A drive to please the men who hounded them

to the hunt, calling and calling their names.
A hive broke inside me, its panic swarming

through me until there was nothing I could say,
and I tilted the points racked above

against every name I once had known.