

Overwintering

VICKI GOODFELLOW DUKE

*And see how the flesh grows back
across a wound, with a great vehemence,
more strong. —Jane Hirshfield*

I.

She hovers
by the filament lamp

hard pellet in her abdomen
and watches

in the blackness
his feet swallowed up
in rough boots,
fingers fumbling in a satchel
for pencils to mark squares
black spruce and birch

a measurement of days,
lumber tally for a fortnight.

She knows the geometry
and shortens the diameter,
gathers her young to wave
at the window

estimates the length of languor
and folds her wings
into the circle.

II.

He comes home
from scaling logs, and finds her
trembling, pupa clustered
in a garland, the tiny ones hanging
by their feet, stung still
flying muscles bitten white
with frost, swollen with nectar
and leaves of milkweed.

He thinks
it had to be this way,

the sharp determination
of points and edges,
precision of angle,

the way she whirls,
her delicate body circling
a wide arc,

as she gives up
a wedge of forewing
deep-veined and orange
and carves her place
in the air.

III.

The bloodline is twig-tangled
knotted by windbreak
and bones.

These are the roots to claim
in honesty,

the rest of a legacy
shades of sawdust, cut and bled
in a bed of grey pulp,

tinged with the vapour of talcy leaves,
the fragrant oil of mentholated groves.

A branch of monarchs
flying, gold and black tossed
from inheritance

fluttering to some kind
of radiance.