

retroperistalsis

i'm going to kill you, she'd said,
and you said, *okay*.

was that the start of it? what kind of hurt
would it take. everything you forgot to say,
salt-cured before the swallow. in the sky &
in your stomach. your heart around my hand, beating.

you wanted a bird so you caught it.
keep your eyes closed and they'll come. all you did was forget,
and all the birds follow the fish into the sea
in the end. (and yet) for now my eyes still fixed on

your mouth & how it cords nature to name—
how you shudder from yours. how i peeled back my
skin to run from mine. how we are still what they call us
whatever stillness they choose to see in our shaking forms.

my mouth alight and your hands
trembling. catch the birds, catch the swell of the wave on the sea
catch yourself
midair, and dive down. dive deep into

the thrash of the heart against its cage, desperate & quiet
so— keep trying to be more
than yourself. keep trying
to change shape.

what did they call us again?
something about girls and crowns they called and
called but your eyes were closed you could not hear,
girl kings and my head held up with your hands

gripped around my neck
 (were you afraid
to lose me or simply eager
to see me gone) .

i'm going to leave, she'd said,
and you said, *stay*.

was that all it took? no kind of ending
to satisfy you. just storms and sealskin
slick between your teeth, closing.

your breath in my mouth
like it would change anything.
your hand in mine—a skin unshed. so

you are the maker and you are the machine
and the bird that dyed your fingers red

is long lost,
give up

and nothing ever happened if you closed your eyes.

(so come up for air)

(don't) tell me you were going to break

me.

i don't know, was i supposed to wake
up? come to the sun come to the wake
come to the burial of the moon under
the sea. (don't) tell me you were go
ing to wake me. (don't) tell me you
were going to try. i'll keep to this
perch, like the sea birds over salt-
washed cliffs. and when i swoop
down the next time, don't break my
flight for the catch. like daedalus's
midnight sun, in freefall: everything
melting in
hopes of
recon
struct
ion.

after the flood

it rained for three days & three nights & when it was done the world was new. & when it was done the people were new & and the trees were new & and the cicadas & walls & wood, new. for everything old was pressed into ashes beneath the waves, under the seal of fathoms & fathoms of water. dirt uncoiling through the river's rush & churning it brown.