

To the Fledgling Thrush

With the round red belly heaving from asthmatic response
to the heat, or from the four beings towering above you,
or from the hours you sat alone in a tangle of leaves and bush—
to your speckled body wriggling through the gray hoodie

where I held you with cupped hands, to your little tufts
of downy feathers sprouting from your head like owl ears,
to your snapping, chirping beak—we called wildlife
rehabilitation centers. None of them took birds.

They said not to touch you. They said don't meddle
with nature. They said some are born to die, that nature
finds ways to survive. They said now there is a line
where trees become concrete, where salmonberries

weighing down leafy branches become drive-thrus
and traffic cones. Where birdsongs become telephone
wires. Where rivers become bottled and mixed with salt
to keep us thirsty. But on the walk through the wetlands,

before we found you, we saw socks in the dirt, plastic cups
and chip wrappers in the deep sink peat bog and a single hiking
shoe on its side under a bush. We saw smoky polypores
and other shelf fungi decomposing recently fallen trees.

Their clean insides looked like IKEA wood. We stepped aside
for motorcyclists to pass and choked on their gas smoke
as they laughed past a solitary water lily floating on its own
reflection. We heard an owl far above, then a siren from 4th

avenue. At the end of the path, we were greeted by a ripe
porta-potty, a 7/11, an empty gravel lot, and a Korean community
center in the historic Denny log cabin, which was used as a real estate
office to sell stolen land. It overlooked a lake where we stopped

to watch birds playing or mating or fighting each other; it was
impossible to tell, but it looked like paradise. A cardinal
meadowhawk landed on a piece of wood protruding
from the water. It flexed its transparent red-veined wings

as it basked in the sun. We liked to think it was posing for us,
that all the birds were out for us, that the sun shone for us.
It's selfish, but we are selfish creatures, taking and taking.
I took pictures, but not of the 7/11 or the shoe on its side

or the wrappers in the bog, or of you. Because I left you
in the bush and drove away and ate liquid nitrogen ice cream
and reveled at the way it stuck to my tongue like the memory
of you has stuck to me, even after you have melted away.