

Maladaptive

*It isn't me, you say,
In none of these pages, nowhere in this book. You,
turn the pictures upside-down—*

But I find you, between five and six,
like a collage of anatomical drafts,
a collection of mismatched symptoms.

Mislabeled Licorice

The nineteenth of the first, our winter
was late. Unresting bleeding-hearts sung
into our panes, pleading for the snow to
fade. Blinded, you sang back—there
are no nets, no sheets
in the cupboards
sufficient to stretch
across your soft sky.

His red feather chest beat in time
with your breath, but your ballad
did nothing to soothe.

You lifted the lid of our oak chest,
reached in to harvest a nurse's aid—
your unused sleep placebo.

Cut them into petite pieces, crush them
to dust—I spill water

on the residue, a proper paste.
 Acute anesthetic to drip past his beak, so he
 can stand the grief while his striped wings freeze.
 Your motions give notions
 to the blood-fronted bird,
 and in payment he sings
 aubades for days.

Piano Keys

It looked like birch, there
 where your antlers branched. And you
 started sleeping sitting up, to keep
 from seeping—thoughts
 leaking—into feather pillows below you.
 So I tore masking tape, I strapped them
 down and bought you hats
 to hide the gaining loss of twenty-
 three years—the growth of an inch
 for every memory you lost.
 But the strips pulled free, and we
 found fractures in fedora fabric.
 But then,
 in the morning I found
 you there, on the edge
 of the clawfoot, cradling
 a mirror from our wall.
 So I brought scissors from the cup,
 and took a seat on the sink
 across from you.
 That day I turned them to ivory,
 and they became new
 piano keys, paler than your skin. And I
 paced the hall while you played
 songs by heart, and when
 I asked you

for a dance
 you asked me
 for a name.

The Hospice in the Woods

American Kestrels flee from these trees—
 scratch Braille with their beaks, tie notes
 to their talons, deliveries for us to find. In the mail,
 brochures of a forest near Olympic Highway.

*Deliver your de(a/e)r to the Pacific 101.
 Houses with roofs of Antelope Bitterbrush—
 Our beds of the finest Great Basin Wild Rye.*

And the postman, he sees. These,
 malignant maladies that Spring brings.
 White prongs peeking, flaring up,
 from your scalp and our sill, to see if he leaves
 letters addressed to someone (to you) and me.

*On second Saturdays we watch Pale Swallowtails
 swim through the sea salt air.
 And our Great Horned Owls, they duel in January.*

I build you Washington, with cutout paper
 dolls of Western White Pine and Pacific ocean tides,
 to coax you from your window seat, to show
 you where—

*They wake up at dawn to Mourning Dove songs,
 and Killdeer make nests on the coast.*

Touristic

We wrote your name and our address
on notes pushed into your pocket.

Draped in orange, you
took steps beyond the tree line
for a breath of air.

Bread trails that left
my hands waved to you—
but we knew,
the crows were going
to take them.