

JADA ACH

## **TWO STORIES OF HER VOYAGE**

When the oldest deer died,  
we covered her in mountain laurel,

placed her body on a bamboo raft,  
and sent her down the creek at dusk.

Some say her journey to river,  
then ocean, was guarded

by a pair of dragonflies, their  
turquoise wings churning wind

as the current grew still. Others  
say she rose from a deep sleep

confused, then fearful, and leapt  
into the deepest waters.

## SOUNDSCAPE

When biologists played recordings  
of Rush Limbaugh  
in the woods,  
    rabbits and bobcats  
    and toads

retreated more than 80 percent

of the time.

    Pupils constricted  
and the weak were left behind.  
Or maybe they chose to stick around,  
curious to witness sound

    tightening into violence.

    I see so many dead birds in Phoenix this summer,  
    but they don't scare me like the dying ones do.

I want to be the woman  
I saw outside of T. J. Maxx  
who scooped up the injured  
pigeon and carried it to her car  
and drove it to a place  
that knows how to do something.

    Help me to bend down  
and cup the bird in my hands, and then—  
tell me—what kind of song do I sing

to wake the dead.

## THE SHOWER

The water brought my bones to life,  
    encouraged the fingers to sprout  
        into ocotillos,  
        raised the ears to attention.

Suddenly, I heard the earth spinning fast  
    around a question: *how old is the oldest rock?*

    or was the cat just scratching at the bathroom door?

I always forget to wash the lower back, the back of the neck, behind the knees,  
    the tender, essential parts of the body I never see.

    Light angles in through the window,

    sets the toilet

    aglow. I lather the feet,  
        overlook the small valleys between each toe.

How many years until we can't hear the crickets,  
and how many more until they return

without us here waiting for them

with our cups of coffee:

    one egg grows full of itself,  
    breaks open,  
        and learns to leave it.

## BLACK FLOWER

At the vanilla farm, the guide  
speaks to us of cultivation  
as though it were a marriage:

“The orchid requires attention,  
unyielding,” he says.  
“You wonder what vanilla is thinking:  
if it holds opinions of the universe,  
if it thinks of you in the evenings.”

How to distill it, to trace the  
aromatic compounds of the orchid  
we have nurtured.  
We measure distance by scent, recall  
the lift of every petal.

In the evenings, we hold our ears to the opening  
and listen.

The vanilla vine grew  
from the memory of two lovers—  
“black flower,” each bud now  
pollinated by hand.

Beneath us,  
roots curl around planetary rocks and bones,  
seek out mineral dust for food, tighten  
their hold on dark pleasure.

Something  
is happening beneath us:  
each root drinking out of need,  
out of love.