

One-hundred and sixty-eighth ovulation

by Martha Ryan

Didn't know how many birds
I'd upholstered until I stripped

and plumage cawed out. Silent
birds I saw plucked in public:

some factory. The fathers I knew
outcounted by the feathers I sat on
flightless.

My plumage gummed up in my throat
all clot all dry flutter all excuse me

please I'd like to
sing. I hacked it up
the fury.

No one applauded—but woke beyond my
sight:

the false sun
the hypoxic roar
the feather strung under my skin
the work of singing across species

broke me so I sang for myself—not sang no, syrinxed:

In surrender to the feather I spit up cud I promise
solitude I offer to never not chorus a note.

I stare I choke on her curls'
swept up barb the mimicry

the mimicry the twin arc from fringe
to eyebrow to lash.

I'd sing her all
my life if I could wake

and never leave the lap of something
joining. Her soon flight her bedside still

nested the opening stares
me awake. I worship memory

until she fills it in—

I dreamt of warmth atop that motherdown
Call it brood, call it
the way I bled into cushions

like all my mothers
made me grieve weight
by blood, that memoir.

Denied form it pulses in
form, my other—made
present against that with

form
that which
forms
that which
vibrates fast enough to keep still.

I say: I remember nothing
but what I wish to know.

Feathers cloud
behind my gaze—like eyelashes

dropped into
yolks of pupil mire.

Remember what I said
I saw?

Mom was thirty when she knew I'd cull
her bone and gore, and I as I near the age
get around to washing the slipcovers.

Martha Ryan is a writer living in Seattle. Her creative work has been published in Foglifter and academic work she has co-authored has appeared in JAMA Open, JAMA Health Forum, and Social Science and Medicine, among other journals. She is currently an MFA student at the University of Washington.