

The
Riddle
of Yes 

Poems by
CAROLYN LOCKE

The Riddle of Yes

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*for my sisters Ann and Sylvia
and sisters of the heart
LL, SG, DLE, VP*



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How It Happens

She's different every day.
This morning, she's the sparrow
you half glimpse
in the hedgerow.

You try not to startle her,
take quiet, gentle steps.
Still, just when you think
you're close enough

to truly see her,
she flits ahead, slips
into leaf shadow
just beyond reach.

And it's not even
that you want
to hold her in your grasp,
that you need

to stroke the soft feathers
on her back, or feel
her warm heart beating.
You only want her

to stop long enough
for your eyes to meet,
for just one of hers
to look deep into yours,

and maybe, as you turn
and walk away, to carry
into the dark the song
she alone can sing.

Part One





In Her Skin

The whole time she's lived here, the river
has flowed in fog so dense she believed
there were no banks to contain it.

From time to time, silent as a cloud
gliding over the moon, a solitary skiff
passed by and vanished.

And all the while, time was suspended,
the way breath leaves the body,
hangs in the air on a cold winter morning.

Premonition

for Tanya

Geese are flying
 through my dreams,
 first a long, trailing V,

then a swirling circle
 of gabbling and honking
 spiraling in on itself

to a tight, pulsing orb.
 Something precious
 I sense

is being held
 at the center—
 but before

I can grasp a thought
 beyond feeling,
 a lone goose

breaks free
 and drops to the ground.
 She stands before me,

shapeshifting—
 now a red fox
 with black-tipped ears.

Her golden eyes
gaze into mine
for one brief moment.

Then she turns,
disappears into the woods,
and I wake

to the emptiness
of your leaving
before you have gone.

She Becomes a Cathedral

Of course she's seen their windows before, been mesmerized
by light penetrating ruby, emerald, lapis, and gold,
by the way it falls transformed on pew, pulpit, or stone floor.

But never has she seen such a window
as when she looks in the mirror and opens her mouth.
There at the back of her throat, three transparent panes
arc upward and narrow to a single point.

And the searing white light that blazes through the glass
is rising out of a black sky within her
rife with the thrum of stars.

Rest in the Riddle of Yes

There's no secret ingredient—what comes to her comes, and she lives without precision, reaching for what should come next and following. First, her skin melts and then one by one each layer below, until she's only bones radiating light. And so, it's imperative that she leave.

She walks out into the world, a breeze circling her joints, weaving through her rib cage, the sun sinking deep into marrow. At dusk, all color draining from the sky, she sees at the edge of the field, a circle of hunched forms shrouded in gray. She doesn't sleep but watches.

Whether they sleep during the night she can't tell. They never move but fade in and out of the fog that swells with dawn. Crows come circling in silence overhead, wings flapping through heavy air. Slowly they unwind themselves and fly in a line toward the river,

lead her to this bank where the water is whispering, *Hush...hush... there's music to be found here*. She's ready now to enter the stream, water flowing over her, morning light dappling through waves, ready to lie with the stones beneath her. Bones of the body, bones of the earth.