


*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.