Numa

An Epic Poem
by
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for Michael and Jamie
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Some, when transform’d, fix in the lasting change;
Some, more deft, thro’ various figures range.
Nothing

stays / shapes
shift / becoming
always / always
in motion / nothing
settled, everlasting
shuffle & stir / in-
complete / flawed /
ravishing
I Becoming
Naps

However you imagine her, asleep
she folds in on herself fawn-like, puma
tail curled to her chin.

Opens

On a high
branch of a cedar, waxwings
nest-build — twigs, grass, fluff —
send down whistles & flickers
of light to the sleeper, who opens
her eyes. A shadow crosses as
one bird dives snatches
a tangle of shed fur &
zigzags up touching nothing.
Sees

Turns her head to the left, turns it to the right, lifts chin, glances up, pivots to see behind. Countless light-arrows radiate in, drawn from distances no one knows — no front down back up — field of directions leaving south east west north in the dust.
Hatches

Numa weaves through the forest
four-legged but wings
flap close to her temples. Slows
beneath river-bottom pines.

Clears a circle, sweeps away
needles, digs a fox hole.

(birds she’s eaten crunching
tiny bones spitting out
beak texture of claws)

Begins by rolling into
an egg-shape, growing
a shell.

bird’s head on
a young girl’s
body / feathery
crest, yellow-
tipped / thin fast
downy legs hop
from one
foot to the
other / a berry
in her hand

back to her body / she
crouches / tail
switching / watches
a rowdy flock skim
the shallows / snapping up dragonflies
Meanders

Ambles, pads, sniffs. Comes to a brake deep in ferns, dives & tumbles under cover, soft, low, thick with fronds. Rolls in the tangle, lies still (unseen) wheels, wallows. Underbrush sways over body invisible, so feathery dense a layer of life carries on at ground level, untouched until now: smasher, scatterer, undulator.
Careens

down
brambled
slope, trips
over hidden
logs, skirts
snags still
standing, skids
into wet ground —
water seeps, pools,
reflects. The dark
light of the woods.
Lingers

Owl, predator herself, stays out of reach. Nods. An interval, silent together, as sounds around them ebb. Child-numen — restless — bounds — the bird lifts off — beat of wings & through the trees a rising murmur buzz snort jabber caw ululation.
Approaches

Stand
of white
birches, trunks
tilted, tops leaning on
one another, lopsided
frame: wide-open
windows, airy walls — a pushing
up, a pulling down — unhurried
balance to imbalance
hidling haven
for trial error
Shifts

Bear is adverse
to imitation / careless
numen, callow demi

god / holds with slow
honning, time biding

best to keep
a distance / try
something grand
out of sight / in
secret / ripen
ruggedize

comes out sketchy / more
critter than beast / tucked
inside rib bones, damp &
warm / knocked-about
passenger within black-furred lumberer

blunder
has to run its course / bide

licks her fur / visceral
sediment / licks away
muck & bile / pulls
apart sticky clumps
of hair / now

sound / springs up
sanguine / hopeful /
hungry
girlchild raccoon nibbles
dew- & raspberries / rises
on hind legs / paw-hands grabbing / this
delicious life / this
summer

Rises

sun-sleepy / she dissolves
to air / balmy, floating /
turns to wind / skims
brush / scoots around
trunks / shimmers
a thousand leaves / flies
skyward / sails / herds
cumulus / bumps
into nimbus / cools
off / drops down
Thumps

grounded / breathes
soil & sweet
rot / half-open
eyes track a black-
cherry shadow over
strands of sun / scratches
her skull on a rough-
bark stump / hears
dry beech leaves, tethered
& tossed / leaps
up / hoof fall / grazes
on stiff grass / crisp
stems, snap of grain

Ripens

eyes shut / she rolls
in red mud / fluffs
her tail / sharpens
nose / ears / waits
for light
to lower / trots
in the border-
lands / thicket,
field / half-grown
kit / forage
or frolic / track
or romp / turns
a somersault
/ pounces
Shifts

Turns her head to the left, turns it to the right, pivots to see behind. Deep hum among clover & goldenrod, scattered thistle — drone murmur whir. Beast-blooms buzz & hover, field swells, lifts —

barely-flicking / Numa nectar-sucks / unfazed by finches digging for seeds / clamorous honeyers / still in the whirling
Floats

fierce thistle / thorny / soft
purple spikes whiten / cast
off ( cloudstuff ( breeze
becomes wind & scads
of seeds swirl ( take her
along ) fly / float / fall
begin
Unfolds

burrows
under / stretches
sunward

years go
by / centuries

still / never
still / awake
from pith to
outer bark / calls
draws in / dark
anchor / needles
of light / cone
Scatters

a small body
within the open
world / unlatched

spins / each
whorl an episode
proterozoin / each

passage caught
between songs /
brushing
colian words / a
chorus reciting
the history of air

hits earth
 glances
off / sheds
Rises

sprawled on pine needles / descends into grace / awakes round & bristly /
quills ( hollow )
eschewed / she clammers skyward / lodges in a nook of pitch-trunk & branch / celestial wind rattles the roost / blows notes across her spines