**Contrail & Other Poems**

**1. Contrail**

You twirl the words *wake up*
in my left ear
with the titillation of a downy feather. My face,

turned towards the fire exit
in sleep's penultimate room, opens
into a smile. Your fingers rake through my hair,

pushing back a few loose strands
eclipsing my left eye.
There is so much light here I could almost

bathe my irresolution in it.
Across your nail,
a cloudy white line, which you say portends

some nutritional deficiency. You laugh
when I say it's the contrail
left by a passing dream. Outside,

the lawn receives the baptism
of dew. I drain
the coffee you made to the dregs

of my past, its taste
lingering in my mouth
with the persistence of a haunting. No words

pass between us,
and we step out into the day burning
its incense before the unresponsive god

of *what-was*. Trees wearing around
their stocky necks the cravat
of shadows take off their leafy caps

to greet us. A dragonfly
perches on a clothesline—
an iridescent funambulist. Its veined wings

fracture the world
into tomorrows
that might never come looking for us.

**2. Orange**

Waiting for the train,
I see the girl on the opposite platform
cup a dark green orange
in her palm,
and feel my body roll up
taut in the refuge of her grip.

When with her painted nail,
she pierces it,
it is as though my belly
is riven with steel.

She peels the rind
and I progress
from slow striptease to cold nudity.

With the spongy pith goes my skin,
and a flayed Marsyas steps out
of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*.

Now she is ripping my limbs apart.

Flesh succumbs.
An acrid tang
mellowed by a blossomy whiff
wafts from my spurting blood,
and I burst inside her mouth—
a sweet sourness—
splattering against the taste buds
of the metro, the lighting-torn sky.

**3. Sugarcane**

We walked through the sugarcane field
in the chili-red light of the evening,
mosquitoes hovering above our heads
like diminutive blood-thirsty angels.

I held a machete high in my hand.
The hem of your wind-blown skirt
kissed the soil's dark lips, and all
around us sugarcane shoots swayed

like stiff-backed cobras under a spell.
As the sun sifted its last honeyed light
through the serrated leaves, I cut down
a bluish-black shoot, peeled its waxy bark,

and offered it to you. A tractor
chugged, and a drongo's tail
twitched like a musical symbol
on an electric pole. I sank my teeth

into the sugary core near where you
had left neat indentations, and felt
a sharp tingle in my spine. A week
later, I discovered the shrivelled shoot

in the mud, our overlapping bite marks
documented along its tapering length
and visited by flies and carpenter ants
as though it were a monument.

### *4. Ensō*

When you have rowed to the brink
of all experience in a boat riddled with holes,
trudged through flaming deserts and lost
your way in forests, grappled with hungry tigers,
climbed mountains with waterfalls
that make an abrupt descent into chaos,
and found there is no place you can call home

except that emptiness within yourself
you left behind for adventures
that seemed to explode into revelations
only to lead you back, in that moment
when your searching falls off its stalk
like a ripe fruit, the mountain streams
will wash your mind clean. Then you

will see darkness opening its eyelids
trimmed with long lashes, red irises
of light blooming in space, and rivers
of molten fire irrigating the universe.
You will see meteors scouring the tundra
of galaxies, great white lotuses,
petalled with flames, dancing on the calyx

of storms, wheels of resplendence
careening through the infinitude,
atoms splintering into multiple worlds,
and moths of fire fluttering in the gardens
of the night as time becomes timeless
and fallen minutes swarm to the clock
like leaves whirling back from the forest floor.

**5. Compliance**

Sometimes your wildness
explodes with vegetation,
and you find a lot of undergrowth
in the clearing left by reason
the last time it bore down
with machete and mattock.
It’s always the neighbours who complain
about the kind of dangerous animals
that can hide in such places.
So, you start pruning.
But you do it grudgingly
with a practised snail-coming-out-of-its-shell
movement of the hands
and snip at the lushness.
Once you have pared down the crowdedness
to a far-flung fondling of leaves,
you throw away the secateurs
and walk away in utter contempt
of yourself for not having
enough of wildness
to be a forest unto yourself.