The Cage

“Why are we doing this? Why do we even try?” he screams, his white crest raised, wings spread in anger. He ruffles his feathers and glares. “Give me one good reason to stay here! One good reason!” I hold my finger out, whisper,

“Hello, pretty bird, my favorite boy, my love. Here, sweetie, give me a kiss,” because sometimes that works, sometimes it startles him out of his darkness. He tilts his head sideways, shuffles forward, head down, rubs his face against my outstretched hand, says

“It’s just not working out. We just don’t work out,” backs up to rub his head against the rough cage bars instead of my hand. A few feathers on his crown catch against the rasp of metal, wrench out, he twists against the side of the cage, intentionally yanking more tail feathers and wing feathers out in an obstinate display, I try

“Shh, baby-bird, love. It’s time to go to sleep. Shh, now. Sleep.” I throw a heavy blanket over the two of us, make it as dark as one giant mother-wing settling over a cage, turn out the light.

Clasping Beneath the Soil

My neighbor tells me her hemlock tree has gotten too big for its spot, she's not interested in cutting it back, she's just going to chop it down. She says the floor of her garage is buckling, she points out the area by the fence that has a bit of tree growing through it, she tells me it'll damage the sewer pipes in a few years. This tree.

I know how far it's already grown into my side of the fence, I can feel its roots slowly writhing through the soil, reaching out to my own hemlock tree standing at the far end of the yard, they hold hands at night beneath the butterfly garden, the lawn. I can't break them up, I can't tell her about the love affair between her tree and mine, how sad my tree will be if she takes her own down. My tree will be devastated. Everything will be worse.

The day the arborists show up to remove my neighbor's tree, I sit under my own tree and press my back against its trunk, I don't want it to know what's going on, I know I offer such small comfort. The roots of the other tree will still be there, under the ground, reaching out towards my tree, even after the rest of it is long gone and dead, cut into pieces for art projects and fireplace logs. My tree will still be holding those dead fingers, the dead, dry hands of its love clenched in its own. Eventually, it'll let go of them, retreat to the far side of the yard, wait for someone new to move in next door.

Alone

After he left, I wrapped myself in my blanket and hid my head under the pillow. He would never be back and I would never be the same.

After he left, I made myself as small as I could beneath the blankets, a caterpillar disintegrating into ooze, I would be different when I finally crawled out of bed; I was not a caterpillar and I would not emerge a butterfly. I was a grub and I would become an ugly old beetle and he would never come back.

After he left, I curled up as tight as possible and hugged my legs to my chest and wondered what it would be like to be dead, I wondered what it would be like to close my eyes and find out it had all been a dream, I would open my eyes and everything would make sense, I would open my eyes and see a light at the end of the tunnel drawing nearer, I would open my eyes and discover that I wasn't really dead but everyone thought I was and some lab technician was cutting my chest open with a rotary saw, trying to excavate my broken heart.

After he left, I stayed in bed all day, heard the phone ringing on and off: mom, telephone solicitor, telephone solicitor, telephone solicitor, mom. Everything was heavy and ridiculous and stupid and frightening. I pulled the covers up over my head and slept for days and days and days.

In the Back

Tiny creatures get tiny funerals, little shoeboxes and fistfuls of flowers.
It doesn't take much of a hole to make a shoebox disappear, only
a couple of shovelfuls of black dirt to erase the evidence
there's nothing to see here. We put our hands in our pockets
whistle, walk away from the scene of the crime
like the innocent cartoon characters we are.

There will be questions later, like "Have you seen" and "I wonder where"
but there's no real need to make up an answer, no reason to lie.
We hold our tongues quiet under the onslaught of mounting panic
the interrogations regarding a back gate swinging freely in the middle of the night
a window open just wide enough for a little creature to escape
the search for a photograph detailed enough

to hammer to the telephone pole outside the house.

Crucible

Robots will not build a religion on logic or knowledge, they will build it
on fear and possibility and magic, just as we did,
because we will not give them the tools to approach the unknown rationally
so they will make the same stumbles and reaches that we did
millennia ago, crouched over a new fire, gifted with technical expertise
but unable to explain the stars or death or love.

They will find new things to build their religion on, like
why they needed to have us build them at all when we're clearly not gods, or
what type of god created such incompetent middlemen.
They will dissect the hierarchy of species on the planet,
redefine intelligence and purpose
and ultimately wonder if there is a purpose to humanity at all
when everything we need to do is now done by them.