

In the Garden

Tumbling about in nervous flight
still getting the feel for the lift—
it flutters
and keeps to shadow
its blue eyes melting into dark.

Papilio Machaon, after Asclepius's son,
or swallowtail because of its wings
like feathers
all geometry and movement
the mute beauty of givenness.

Once it crawled on a fennel stalk
gorging on sweet leaves until it
felt something
in its own fullness, and outside
a sputter of wind, a mutter
of movement here in the garden
where once it spun its chrysalis
like a tomb
and every part of who it was—
feet osmeterium spiracles—

and all, disappeared, died, transformed
beyond anything it could have
imagined
the imago with its yellow
wings, black veins, red-blue
eyes that don't see or hear but feel
a prayer, a groaning, a plea—
quivering
through its wings, engines of flight
still slick with emergence.

—John Alba Cutler

This poem tied for third place in the 2021 Clinton F. Larson Poetry Contest, sponsored by BYU Studies.