

KAYWYNNE ADAMS

The Outing

*It is as in the story—Orpheus sent
to fetch the ghost to another world—
to life:*

If we act just right, it is possible.

—William Bronk, *The Sense of Passage*

1.

The monarch lays eggs only on
the milkweed plant, the karner blue
only on the wild blue lupin
plant. The wood thrush
is called swamp angel. The irises,
after rain, look like women
in watered-silk gowns. We are hunting
the sweet morel. It is April in a time
when towns still grow on the earth like flowers.
We are breathing green, gold, opal, pink,
cobalt, yellow, silver, ash,
heat, coal, crimson. My dress is printed
with stars of the primrose. Six cousins
and three aunts are wandering into and out of
dimensions unavailable to the senses
like ships that have crossed all meridians
in storms darker than the ferrocyanides
of iron. We do not know that the blue-gray
gnatcatcher, the yellow-billed cuckoo, the scarlet
tanager, the ovenbird, the worm-eating
warbler and the wood thrush are doomed
to disappear by the end of the century, but we can read
time signatures and the sounds
of things passing away. We do not know that the planet Mars
has 676.9 days; but, if we sit by a dead

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rabbit all afternoon, we can see
blood turning into light. The three
civilizations that appeared and disappeared
on this part of the earth—the Woodland, the Mississippian,
the Cahokian—left with us
the passion of trees,
especially the old catalpa tree that grows
at the edge of the family burial plot
in the village cemetery on the Mississippi bluffs.
Catalpa, *kutuhlpa* in the language of the Creek
tribe, means “head with wings” and refers to its
mysterious flowers which look like a thousand
helmets of Mercury.

Being children we love the long, slender
pods of that tree, the “cigars” we can pretend
to smoke. “Indian Beans.” Against the horizon,
just before dark, its silhouette is a catafalque.
As we move deeper into the woods the aunts
begin to sing a progression of minor
chords. They are dressed in white
tiffany, imbricate pine cones. They are
only girls, really. A thousand miles inland they talk
of lifeboats painted by Winslow Homer.
Suddenly we come into the kingdom of the morel.
Hundreds. Electrifying. Alive. Wearing crowns.

2.

Now we are the aunts.