

Swallowtail

JAMES LONGENBACH

1.

Leaves, a pattern
Of stars between overlapping
Locust and pine—

I woke up on a gurney
Covered with wires.
I was breathing

But my chest was burned: seconds
Creeping past me in a row.
Organs, arteries, thousands of intersecting parts.

Your hair was cut shorter then.
In time, I liked my second
Body better
Than the first.

2.

When an insect assumes
A different shape,
A form,

It doesn't deceive;
It becomes a different
Version of itself.
Swallowtail

Lilting through a field
Of Queen Anne's lace, light
Reflecting up from earth, returning

Through the veined
Transparence
Of wings—

When I opened my eyes at first
I saw nothing.
I heard footsteps
ta tum ta tum
My heartbeat running back to me—your

Arms around me,
Tangle of wires.
I watched you

Watch me
Taking shape.

3.

At first there were many of them.
They slept in hammocks
Dangling from the trees.
Their bodies grew

But couldn't change,
Then changed
But couldn't exist—they were

Already missing:
Canvas hanging stiff,
A split cocoon.

In time, a few returned.
Light between the branches
Flickering, but sure.

Who am I, moving toward you?
Who are you?