

THE GARDEN

By Larissa Pham

For Benedict Scheuer's "Insignificant Patch of Earth"

Two birds are in a forest, talking. I overheard them
and wrote down what they said.

Once there was a worm and it ate the whole world.
The world passed through its body and formed this path

where we now walk. This path is a line. The line is
the original form by which all living things take their speech.

I have a question, says one bird, What's a line?
A line is the first dimension from which

all other dimensions spring. A line
is produced inside the self without much thinking.

What's a dimension?
The space in which this poem takes place, little bird.

And what is the self?
The self is the collection of magnetic impulses inside a flower.

And what is thinking?
Thinking is what you do when you use your hands in the garden.

Moving along the path, wiggling, is a snake, made of snake things.
It goes about its day doing snake things.

And beneath the snake is the soil that has passed
through the worm. And insects with hard shells

and blind gnats and glossy red and black ants holding
treasures to take back to their queen.

Here is the mole that eats the insects. When asleep
in his burrow, he feels so safe he can dream.

And here is the white fungi, latticed, fibrous
that shepherds the water to the roots of trees.

Here are the silk lines the spider makes, and the line here
and the line here and the line where they intersect makes a crossroad

makes a web, the web is of the knowledge of her body,
which is a knowledge only she knows. She will pass it on:

Hanging from the underside of a leaf, her eggs nestle in a sac.
All of it is vibrating, the vibrating chatter of living

and dying things, buzzing like a bee,
and there are bees, heavy-headed and shaggy as buffalo,

darting through the garden with their panniers of pollen.
A flower is the calculation of internal genetics

looking for the best external configuration.
Dahlia, marigold, iris, chrysanthemum, milkweed

for the monarchs, who migrate south in winter. And
geranium, goldenrod, black-eyed susan. White trillium,

who knows good things come in threes. Petal, leaf, ravens.
It's about to rain. Clouds scud low across the sky,

And the birds are speaking to each other
in a language I don't understand. One

flies off; the other follows.
But before they go, one last question.

What's in the sky?
Stars, even when we can't see them.

Under the shelter of the tree the birds have left,
there's space to keep dry. We'll both fit.

Come,
Let's go closer to the garden.