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Poetry by Lesley Wheeler



Catbird

Mimic the mimid, heavy with midges
and a trashy mewling song. She swipes
stalks from the bed, hops to the shortest
post of the fence, sidles up it then glides
with a beakful to build, somewhere
low down, a steeply-angled nest.
A jaded scheme; no effort wasted.
Why work one wingbeat harder
than this untidy world requires?

Catbird

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The only possible reply: a screech
from the lilac, its flower-cones
gone brown, valentine leaves concealing
a clutch of blue-green eggs, or
green-blue, dubious tint but
hot with obstinacy, late spring
luck, and all her cupped refusals.

_[5]



Step One

The news outside is nothing good. Catbird
flirts her tail a while then gives it up,
too hot to cry. A black walnut fruits hard,
concealing fists beneath serrated leaflets.
Creepers strangle laurels. The creek's a drip
over dusty scree. Crabs gleam like planets

of ill omen. But at least that world's alive

Catbird

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to rage and mourn. Step from the insulated
box where vents exhale, dreamless, sedated,
and a washing machine simulates a grief
you do not feel, to share the evil weather.
Let half-dead grass crackle underfoot. Sweat.
Be observed. Trees will whisper overhead
in another language. They're not happy, either.

_[5]

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Lesley Wheeler is the author of two new books: *The State She's In* (Tinderbox Editions, 2020) and *Unbecoming* (Aqueduct Press, 2020). *Poetry's Possible Worlds*, her essay collection about twenty-first-century poetry, is forthcoming in 2021. Her poems and essays appear in *The Common*, *Crab Orchard Review*, *Ecotone*, *The Massachusetts Review*, and other journals, and she is poetry editor of *Shenandoah*. Wheeler lives in Virginia and teaches at Washington and Lee University.

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