

Janet Bowdan

Lyrebird Calls

It has its own call. But since it can
 imitate the songs of other
 Australian birds, the buzz of lawnmowers,
 the wind in the trees, a human voice,
 a motorcycle, a car alarm, a kookaburra
 laughing or any sound it hears, why not a concerto,
 a symphony, as long as we bring them into the woods?
 Why not meet a lyrebird walking through the bush
 off a trail in the Blue Mountains, in Katoomba, casually
 clawing up the dirt for edibles, insects,
 and seeing the human not back away but call?
 Why not respond, bird to hiker, hiker to bird,
 repeat the melody or segue into harmony?

I have been telling people, I saw a lyrebird
 in the wild. This takes my breath away but most
 of them just blink and ask What is
 a lyrebird. In the story three sisters by accident aroused
 a bunyip (a bunyip? they ask: a monster you
 don't want to arouse) could not run from him fast enough
 so their father to protect them turned them into rocks
 and tried to lead the bunyip away himself then
 circle back to disenchant his daughters
 but the bunyip catching up, he turned himself
 into a lyrebird. No changing back. I can carry the coins
 with me, or the photograph from the Healesville Sanctuary,
 but the coinbird is stylized, its tail the wrong way
 its head hidden by the 10c currency to fit in so fantastically,
 the picturebird blending so well into the dirt and ferns
 you have to believe it's there to see it.

And yet it is large, the size of a peacock,
the creamy brown and copper colors of a pheasant,
its tail long, sweeping feathers that curl
into something like the shape of a lyre
until you could imagine holding a harp, singing
to its company.

Think of the lies it tells, calling unseen
from somewhere in the trees, making you wonder where
the chainsaw is, or put up your collar preparing
for rain. Think of music. Think of promises
of rescue, of value, of safety and risk. The lyrebird
probably is thinking of food.