Invasive Species

The bees are Africanized. All elm disease is Dutch. The carp is Asian, the python of the Everglades specifically Burmese. The plague bacillus sailed from India to Europe. Europe coughed khaki back at India. Everything is alien, especially starthistle with its spurs and bursts, unearthly, mapping its home galaxy like a foundling with a fleur-de-lys foot tattoo. Though even lilies hitchhike—every ditch lily was once a tiger lily, treasured in the garden of a Mughal. Everybody thinks the Mughals Indian, but Mughal comes from Mongol. Invaders make themselves at home and home remakes them into natives. Everybody comes from someplace else where they were royal refugees. We flower where we flower, flinging roots like ropes from runaway hot air balloons to snag a city’s skyline. It never feels like an invasion when you’re doing it. It feels like parenting, like cooking what you’ve always cooked, like dancing with your grandma at a noisy wedding. But then you turn to see the horrified park rangers staring at you, calling in the experts—look at this, what do we do, they’re everywhere. You wonder who they mean, but then you see. Their poison hemlock? That is you. Their brown tree snake. Their killer bee.
English is my native anguish. I was born here, read here, teased and torn here. Vocative, ablative, locative, alive:
English was a dislocation navigating oceans. Wherever it arrived,
it broke and brokered words, its little bits of Britain pilfered, bartered, written, looted, hoarded, heard.
Papa swapped a world for shiny colored beads, for dandelion seeds. We are subject verbs.
The root word of my name hooks a foreign land, long-since-shifted sand books cannot reclaim.

Graft of tongue, gift of dust, mother and stranger, sing the kedgeree, the everything at once you’ve made of us.