

## HAMMER

Rough hands passed me down a hundred years,  
my head dulled and pitted, my work  
disguised by weeds, collapsed by sun.  
Still, I can discern a boy's soft hand  
the milk of his palm.

We smashed bird nests in the dovecote.  
Then his mother's watch, his sister's doll,  
the eyes especially—glass fruit.  
Branches, lanterns, street signs,  
windows streaked with rain.

If I could be reborn, I'd be a vessel  
for water—a bowl for filling. A pail.  
Bring the water, pour the water.  
Let the horses drink.

## CISTERN

Inside me is a coffer:  
maple leaves and swampwood  
the bones of birds

a night sky in reverse  
split silk of moth wings  
trembling at the seams

*A teaspoon of rain for every failure  
A robin's egg preserved for every loss*

At the bottom is a hammer    steal claw  
wooden handle    a bracelet nestled  
in the wings of algae

Everything within me sleeps  
grows a fine suit of hair

What is it about the womb    dark  
water    black diadem of stars  
that makes the living turn away?

Only the mother who's lost a daughter  
comes to me for answers  
bare feet silent on the path

She lies belly-down on the frozen earth  
casts her long pale arms  
like winter branches    searching  
for the waiting hand

## CISTERN AND HAMMER

**Cistern:** The girl looks peaceful as if she's dreaming about birds that are really angels, long-tailed and whistling in the dogwood.

**Hammer:** No, she looks curious—awake. One eye is open—see? Like she's gazing through a telescope at busy stars.

**Cistern:** Her mind was always moving, like a carnival. You can almost see it there, blinking out behind the skull.

**Hammer:** I can't stop thinking of the sound!

**Cistern:** Of what? The wasp nest? The ticking watch? Everything cries if you listen.

**Hammer:** The back of her head, winter melon. Finality of the snap.

**Cistern:** What happened next?

**Hammer:** The peach trees heard. Bluebirds lifted like raindrops in reverse. Her pierced "O" rose above the orchard.

**Cistern:** And? Did the boy weep?

**Hammer:** His heart came tearing out his middle like a fruit bat, flew into the sun. His body cleaved in two and ran in opposite directions.

**Cistern:** Did the hunter run too?

**Hammer:** The hunter never runs. He watches, waits, sees the world through a scope.

**Cistern:** The ground is rumbling. A machine is coming close, a crane.

**Hammer:** She's turning into a pheasant that might be an angel, covered in hair or feathers. She's beastlike.

**Cistern:** I can only hold vigil, pull the darkness in like a heavy shawl.

**Hammer:** Will they find me? Find her?

**Cistern:** Everyone knows I am the darkest water. See the tadpoles darting? Splitting their limbs to flee?

**Hammer:** I want to stay here, to be covered in fur, to sleep as an animal sleeps.

**Cistern:** They will drain me if they have to.

**Hammer:** Will it hurt?

**Cistern:** Pain is part of the story, the blood-dark thread that stitches us together. Are you still there?

**Hammer:** Just barely. Will you watch me as I sleep?

## CRADLE

She takes up the broom.  
First the downstairs, shh, shh, shh  
in the girl's room, shh, shh, shh across the kitchen.

All day I hear the brushing.  
She finds me in the attic, glides  
her hand across my quilted silks, and hangs  
a mobile just out of reach:  
faded stars, arc of comet dust.

Up here, our world is a toppled  
snow globe, sky of cobwebs, gauzy cloudbank  
of no heaven. All the winter trees downed  
in pools of chipped porcelain—so much  
to clean, to clear quietly away.

I want to tell her stop—cry out for something!  
Ask for the wide field, leave in search of the wolf.  
I will wait in the crawlspace, rock myself,  
say each of their thousand  
names, oh misfortune, oh cracked rib,  
oh world turned on its head—  
I've held no other since.

## BROOM

Once I was a girl chased through the woods by a boy I loved.  
My world was still box-like. I couldn't quite see

where I was running to, or what I was running from. I ran through  
thorn and barbed wire until my nightgown tore into slack red mouths.

When you are young and chased through the woods  
by a boy you love, or think you love, you crawl

into things. A clawfoot tub, a broken dovecote, a rusty truck  
nose deep in the river, rats pouring out like water.

When you are young and chased through the woods,  
you cry for an angel with the face of your mother.

You cry through the wire and thorn, but her wings catch  
on the spires of pines and she falls through the trees with a thud.

The bodies of dead girls expel their fluids all at once,  
through their mouths. The teeth fall out first, lips blacken, recede.

The tongue dries, curls, withers. Hair stiffens into long straws,  
and their supple bodies harden into sleek, wooden sticks.

I was fabled to a girl left in the woods, stripped down,  
silenced, and turned into a broom. I know I am not alone.

All over the world there is another version of me.  
We are everywhere and always. *Sbb, sbb, sbb*, we say

brushing your kitchen floor. *Sbb, sbb, sbb* we say sweeping your porch.  
You put us away without a thought. I open my mouth in the closet.