

ANGER

Something I ate as a child: picked from the floor,
bit off its scaly head and swallowed whole

before my mother could say, wash it first. It grew
like a fat seed, a vine leafing out, bearing livid

orange fruit. I once burned a whole afternoon
down, pitched a teakettle through the front

window, loving the shatter that poured all
over the sofa. If I have a soul it never left me

in anger, only stood on the other side of the room
trying not to be noticed while my body flew

like a balloon let go, just one leg to stand on
when it finally came back. Even that kicked

from under me when death shoved its black
snout into one friend then another, rooting them

out, and I went down like an old lady on ice.
Now I am an old lady on ice, chilled to the bone.

Look how I have to make my hands into fists
to keep them warm.

THE BOOK OF QUESTIONS

The book of *10,000 Answers to Questions*
compiled in 1933 by Frederic J. Haskin,
director of the world's largest information bureau,
is falling apart.

There is an orange owl on the cover
and inside, my father's faint inscription,
to a daughter always asking,

and none of the answers

I ever wanted. Is it true monkeys can't swim? [No.]

How long will white flour keep? [Three months.]

How many different causes of death are there? [Fifteen.]

Just inside the cover is a list
of questions I would have asked my father—

Will all my friends die?

Are the dinosaurs coming back?

Was Jesus a real person?

—but didn't, knowing I would stand
next to his chair for an hour and listen to what
he had to say about my sisters, my mother, his mother,
the Catholic Church and all its sacraments, the Pope
and the shroud of Turin, more of my questions
circling as he spoke:

Why do you quit all your jobs?

Why do you sleep in the attic?

What do you write in your notebook?

And still no answers now that he's been dead
longer than he was alive, but I'm asking
him here again, with Haskin's book on my desk
open to my favorite page—

What is the unpardonable sin? [A man's lust for his daughters.]

—binding coming undone, and in its back

pages a maple leaf pressed in the halo

of a stain it gave up years ago.