

The Practical Knowledge of Women

A pragmatist
to all appearances, my father
has spent his life
with steel and fire

but again brings out the little bird
and trusts her to her mate,
her life the size of a wine cork
and fragile as apple blossom.

"He misses her," he explains,
and it is I
with my supposedly impractical education
who can see the mistake.

She spends a week or so
in the larger cage,
sleeping beside him
on a spindly branch

and it convinces my father,
but not me.
It is the practical knowledge of women:
the man who will pluck a feather
will pick your wings bare,

and he who will nearly kill you
will kill you, eventually.
My father believes in love.
So do I, but I also believe

in the bone-cold January days
I spent in an old farmhouse
away from a sharp beak.
I believe in many things

that only look like love
from odd angles, that cannot be
proven beyond any shadows,
but speak the lack.

I believe
in the bare places
where feathers
have never
grown back

Peas

My mother could make me eat peas,
but not chew them.

I must have swallowed a gallon
whole like medication,
her motives
vitamins dipped in gall.

Later, she could make me tell her
events, but not how I felt.
I'd hold crushes or despair in my mouth
for hours until I could excuse myself
to the cold altar of the bathroom,
offer up the green
flesh of my teenage heart
to an empty room.

Even now, she tiptoes
around perceived scorn,
recoils from the black pits
of old fires
as if the specter of their heat
still frightens her, as if
they might reignite
spontaneously
and swallow her
whole

Earth from Space

I love best alone,

our apartment
at the bottom of the hill a sunken glow.

There's our life,

I want to say (but don't). We watch the glass door,
waiting to see

ourselves walk by, inside,
astronauts watching Earth from space.

It reminds me of you

last winter, on skates—

how I expected your clumsiness,
but you glided away. How you looked
from the far end of the rink:

oblivious, distant, whole in a way
that crushed my ribs like paper.

I'm never

this close up close, I didn't want to say.

30,000

Pushed off
like a swimmer from a pool wall
deep into a cold ripple
of burned pearls.
Our flying dollhouse.

I pretend to read
but how
the lush whirl of earth, below;
my eyes drag back
like dogs pulling leashes,
resentful of my insistence
on the banal.

my god, I think, listening
for the silence
that coats the world,
but the engines
bored as cattle
lumber on. My open book
tells its story
to the wall.