Who keeps your secrets
now?—now that the grain you kept
to feed the winter herd
is gone, the cows long gone
from the stalls where not even
their ghosts shift in the cold-
sealed dim and imagine
pasture. The metal rungs
that climb your side start
halfway up and hang useless,
now that you are made
of silence, of cinderblocks
encircling air. Who calls
the sparrows to cling
to the rim of you, and trace
their momentary outlines
against the flux of sky?
Do you know that sometimes
I hear my lover in another
room, and think for a moment
he is the one I told myself
I loved before, the one
who—? Little engine
of the mind stuttering, little
needle skipping against
the record’s black disc
where it hits the scratched
place, the damage—before
someone lifts the player’s arm
and shifts it so the song
can go on. Please tell me
you remember the time my new love
and I found our way
through the wrecked barn’s
understory, and unbolted
the door that led to you.
We could finally see inside
to where animal skeletons
gleamed in the circle of grass
at your base—not, of course,
the cows, but wild things
trapped, unable to scale
your steep sides to the mute
O far above, the open mouth
muffled by cloud. Who could
tell us how the animals came
to die there, fell or strayed
into something finished? Who
could give us the story we thought
we wanted to hear? And which one
of us thought to call you
ruined then, which one
to name you almost beautiful?
You wanted to live forever inside the book of flowers. *Peony foxglove geranium rose*, each single pink startled and shone there. And the salmon-walled houses on the island where you were child: you rode your bike past their blushes. Pink of thrum and pulse, rouge and fuchsia. Pink of touch-me-there. Mornings in the unheated pool, blood rushing the surface of skin. Pink of just-beneath. Of knuckle and cheek, secret pink behind the knee. Pink encircled you, called with its rough cat’s tongue. Instead you hid. Girl-not-girl, dressed in dull navy blue, drab green, envying the deer that turns the color of the forest it enters. Color of November and vanishment. But what silks the palm like rose petals. What glides and tarries so. You came late to pink, though pink was always here. The one who holds your face in both hands. The one who says I see you. Nothing silks so. Pink of *oh*. Pink of see-me. Of labia and lip, of welts raised by poison ivy on the tender inlet of wrist. Who kissed
you in woods where the deer keep their secrets. Who holds. Pink of wound between the sutures. Pink of live. See? You are where you wanted to be. Alive inside. Here, your book of flowers.
For years, you called it
by the wrong name: the story

named for the girl, herself named
for the hedge of blossom and thorn

that binds her and keeps her
safe. Petals interrupting

the thicketed pelt of green.
How easy, then, to be

mistaken. To be so lost
and somehow found. In the story, the girl

barely sees the needle, fevered silver
that abandons her to a century

of sleep. But she was never
called Beauty. In the story when

she wakes, the story
is over, and so everything

can begin.
A BRIEF HISTORY OF SILK

I gave the yellow skirt away
and now some other woman wears it.
This mild February day
my body longs for spring.
But I remember the skirt
was heavy, made for winter,
it's color not of pollen
but closer to the streetlamp
that comes on just before
night arrives entirely,
when another life,
in its wholeness,
offers itself to be seen.
Look up this time
to where (there is

a word for this) their
leafless branches parcel sky

into pieces small enough
to hold What is it

you have asked
to stay birds unfurling

their briefest gestures above you
their shapes clarified

as things are before dark
In a book in another language

there is a word for the way
you must make shards

of your longing which was
already broken and thus

complete The birds
move smaller until

they are still inside you
until they sleep
THE GIRL WITH NO HANDS

eats the pear with only
her mouth, steps close
to the brimming tree & takes
the fruit with lips & teeth,
her maimed arms tied
behind her back. Later
in the story she will
marry, later still be parted
from her love. But now
she steps toward the tree as if
to enter it, as if the tree
were gate or door or
her own unharmed body
somehow kept whole. I know
there is a story inside
this story, one I cannot
read. A story inside the tree
the girl presses her entire
handless body into,
as if she might become
that leafy other. First time
you stepped your body

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into mine: crickets, streetlights, 
the nocturnal city

breathing. Before then, 
before I knew you, I touched you

with the girl’s lost hands, the gone-hands hidden inside my own. Before

the pear, the tree, the girl walked & walked, she slept

in a thicket from which she crept at dawn. For so

long, the story was about hunger, as maybe

most stories are. I press the side of my face against

the space between your shoulder blades. Did I say

at the end the girl’s hands grow back? Did I tell you

it is summer?—& the girl is ravenous, & the tree

is green as never, or always.
The grass doesn’t save it,  
the earth doesn’t: the moisture  
finally arrived from the sky  
giving itself  
back to itself, returning  
the dust-colored hills  
to green. This  
is what stuns me: the one  
small rain that appeared  
and vanished  
two days ago has  
proved enough to press,  
from fissured ground, so many  
slender wildflowers whose names  
I can’t recall, flickering  
like the words of the friend  
I follow along the red-dirt whip  
of trail, the ones I breathe  
into some damp, imagined organ  
where I try to make them mean  
against the day that says  
forget, forget.  
Passing the reservoir, we see  
the line where, in other, lusher  
years, the water reached, high  
on its dry concrete side.  
We watch and the parched  
hills don’t watch back,  
too intent on their desire  
to bloom themselves  
into oblivion. What do I do  
with this nameless sadness

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I must have watered
just enough:
never quite flowering
nor ever sufficiently tindery
to set alight.