

## The Handless Maiden

*Once there was a miller who wished  
to marry his daughter to the Devil  
in exchange for gold. When she  
refused, her father cut off her  
hands. . . .*

Suddenly the house had no doors.  
I cried Daddy! Daddy! to stop him  
but the pain came down  
and my hands fell onto the floor  
in front of me like kittens,  
fingers curled around my thumbs,  
hiding my thumbs.  
I wanted to pick up my hands  
in my teeth and carry them away  
to a nest, but there wasn't time.

I ran and then I crawled,  
turning back to lick up the blood trace  
so he couldn't find my trail.  
The forest closed behind me,  
branches locked like arms guarding,  
an insignia of sun on the pines.

That night I lay next to a fallen log  
as though it were my mother.  
My dream tasted of metal.  
When I woke in the wet leaves  
I knew it was not a dream.

All winter I listened to the snow  
whisper of what must not be given away.  
No! grew as round in my mouth as an apple.  
My teeth broke the green skin  
and I tasted the tart lesson:  
I had held out my hands  
when my father commanded me  
although I saw his knife.

When the white trees blossomed like milk,  
I felt the itch of new fingers  
unfurling, crisp as crocuses,  
from the buds of my wounds.

## Jacob Wrestles with the Angel: an Update

He was sleeping in the desert  
when the naked angel swooped into his dream  
like an aerialist releasing her trapeze.

They knelt, shadow by shadow, on the sand.  
His arm over her slim back,  
he cried, "Begin!" because she seemed a kid,  
and he tasted a quick take-down.

But she hurled him over her shoulder,  
spread him out like a wolf pelt,  
rose above him, a falcon  
with her talons in his wrists.  
Then she unfurled herself, as sweet and green  
as the riverbed in his groin.

Seeking the beginning,  
he battered into her  
until he burst through angel into sky.  
Without wind, without sound,  
"as a cloud races through sapphire air,"  
he raced toward the light.  
All night he gazed into the sun.

At dawn the angel lolled on her back  
while he bobbed overhead like a box kite,  
a helium balloon,  
a new flag dancing, clean as a flame.  
She hauled him down like a jib.

"But who won?" he begged, as he cut  
his bread for her and poured the goat milk.  
She smiled, and suddenly  
he woke alone in the desert of his bed.

## The Wolf In My Mother

*("East German mother says goodbye to her daughter through  
the embassy fence." AP photo, September, 1989)*

When I understood that I must leave my home  
I called to the wolf in my mother  
to guide me to the gate.

And her wolf trotted to me on long legs,  
her eyes yellow, her guard hairs gray  
on her golden underfur. She sniffed me head and tail,  
then lifted her muzzle  
and rubbed it along my cheek, across my mouth.  
I tasted blood  
and dark water of the den she'd come from.

Beneath some birches she trampled down the grass,  
flattened a green we curled into, her beside me,  
her head on my shoulder, her paw at my breast.  
All night I heard the rhythm of dreams leaping  
through her heart, felt her tremble  
as her heart gave chase.

At first light I followed her again.  
How thin her flanks were, how she limped  
from old wounds, but still she loped ahead.  
Often she gazed back, drawing me on,  
showing me how I must chase without swerving.

The fence. The gate. Through the iron  
we touched a last time, breath to breath.  
Run! she told me,  
Remember, your own wolf runs with you now!  
So somehow I ran, hearing just behind me,  
as I do tonight,  
the whisper of her longer stride,  
knowing her shadow trails mine.