

Chosen by Richard Jackson as Winner of the Lynda Hull Memorial Poetry Prize

MOLLY BASHAW

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*There Were No Mirrors in That Farmhouse*

Peacocks screamed us into ourselves.  
In wood, in wool, we welled up, about to appear.  
We could not decide if our faces were most ours  
in the yellow hawthorn, the cornhusk, or milk.  
In bonfires we stayed the same, in moss we aged.  
We called out to ourselves like one black ox  
braying across the pasture to the other black ox.  
And when the wind rose at night we heard  
the barn swallows gather and land inside us.  
Kerosene lamps threw our bodies onto the walls.  
Deer in the dogwood lee breathed us to sleep.

As if this were not enough to keep us there,  
we tied ourselves to the dun mare, we held on  
to wooden handles, we covered ourselves  
with wool and buttons, saying: my stonewall,  
my dark barn, my marmot, my ptarmigan,

my tilth, my kiln. We gathered heavy words  
until we were full as the silo once full of grain.  
When we dreamt of a ghost caught  
on the mulberry bush where silkworms chewed  
through a shawl, we woke again to clothesline  
carrying our stiff pants.

Late evening in the lit barn we  
brought the stone boat to a halt, soft-whistled  
our team back into its stall. It must have been  
because we had been separating stones  
from pebbles from stones so deeply gone  
they could not touch the plow, stones  
from boulders for our wall, that the hay bale  
we threw down from the loft, held together  
by two short pieces of twine,  
seemed weightless and full of light.  
The whole field still moving inside it.