

Beanstalk

How mundane those things that change us,
the line from crashed finch to sliced finger
to my daughter's loathing for homemade bread—
twelve tinny notes linking one story to another
as on "All Things Considered," where D.C.
cherry blossoms segue to Kabul's bone trade,
family plots unearthed because Pakistanis
will pay to grind the bones for cooking oil,
soap, chicken feed: the dead unplanted
to feed the starving and their starving poultry.
What's a body worth? Chickenfeed.
Yet, meaning *yes, but*, ask the dozen finches
who risk dusk for one last seed among
the husks brusquely tossed aside. Husk—a word
for those finch bodies as well as ours, though

what prize each enwraps is only speculation.
Chickenfeed? Being, Heidegger says, resides
in being-in-the-world not out of it. Yet.
How are we to know till we've left it,
smashed headlong into the glass we saw too late,
happy to be meeting the sister Other
eye to eye? Oh sure. I don't buy that.
Ask the crashed finch, flushed by the neighbor's
flabby tabby—tuft of feather on windowpane,
wing dust as serrated as our bread knife.
Worth what, a couple good rhymes.
Ask Jack in the Beanstalk, whose English bones
a giant threatened to grind for bread.
Ask Man Ray, fresh from Nazi Paris,
hitching NY to LA with a tie salesman
who pitched cheap wares at truck stop
and tourist trap. Paisley and polka dots,
collegiate hues, a blood red bold enough
to enliven even the stiffest pin stripe.
Capitalism's knot, the noose about our neck,
two for ten dollars. What can't be sold?
Safe in LA, Man Ray traded every tie he owned
for a shoe string he looped beneath his collar.
A price for everything, I'm thinking, as my daughter
slices her loaf of silence: "So hungry, they dig up
their dead?" At twelve, she's learned the names
of bone, muscle, organ, and the other names
for those other parts, too, in classroom

and all-night slumber party confession.
What's a body worth? *Fe, fi, fo, fum.*

Showering, she runs the well dry, pondering
the angle of water on belly and thigh.
The pump coughs air and still she stares,
unrecognizable, in the frantic antiseptic
bathroom light, mirror so fogged one body
meets the other along a path toward the river
she knows is there but can't see. Yet,
meaning *still to come*. The answer?
It turns out 98 cents, that old joke,
if hauled across the mountains to Pakistan.
Just 50 cents, 7,000 Afghans, in Kabul.
Then what's a shovel for? To plant the dead
and dig them up. Meaning you shouldn't listen
to the radio if you've enough bread and few do.
What price guilt? Slice finger and Band-Aid.

Fact is, each breath becomes bone
becomes dust. *Yes, but* what's a shovel for?
To plant the living who bloom right here.
Meaning if I had a hammer, if I had a hammer...
I'd still choose a shovel to plant the carload
of untagged, close-out perennials I bought
not knowing what, pledged to the double edge
of faith and desolation any life rides.
Any life, any ride. Who knows what you get?
Beans. I'd waited fall through summer to find out.
Ask Jack. I'd dusted bone meal so their roots
knuckled down. What can't be bought?
Go ask my daughter. It's time, time. *Yes, but.*
Oh shut up! I love this slew of blue lupine
and immaculate black-eyed Susan, a plenum of delphinium
blowing its gold-throated trumpet now. This now.