

RACHEL MCKIBBENS

Across the Street from the Whitmore Home for Girls, 1949

The Mad Girls climb the wet hill,
breathe the sharp air through sick-green lungs.
The Wildest One wanders off like an old cow
and finds a steaming breast inside a footprint in the snow.
She slips it into her glove, holds it close like a darling.

At night, she suckles the lavender tit, still warm
in her hard little hands. She drapes it over her heart—
the closest she will ever come to a Woman Thing.

She sleeps on her right side with the breast
tucked between her legs. Her eyes flutter like a rocked doll.
She dreams of Before the Father, when her body
was smooth as a crab, her fingers
tip-toe soft. Her mouth was a shining crown,
her hair moved like a hungry dog.
Outside her bedroom, the Lonesome Boys hide in trees
to watch the Father lift her gown.

In the morning, she is who she is again.
Her hair, a soft black brick, her body held together
by hammers. The breast is shriveled up. Gone cold
in her lap. A death-blue fish with one stone eye.