MARIA HUMMEL

Variations on Mary

Mary is the miller’s daughter, the little man the angel. He comes to her spun in gold. God will give you a husband, a son. Then, one day, you will let God take the son away. Her child is born, placed in straw. She forgets her promise.

Mary is the mirror who beholds the queen and sees beauty elsewhere.

Mary minds the ashes. Mary wears glass shoes. She loses them to show other girls how small and light you must become.

Mary has brothers. A witch changes them to swans. Mary walks the fields, plucking nettles for shirts to make them men again. Her hands bleed as if stung with a hundred tiny nails. She is beautiful and silent and dutiful. A king takes Mary for his wife, but when she bears his son, the babe is stolen, and her mouth smeared red in her sleep. She wakes, tasting flesh. She almost believes the malicious lie. She knows why she would do it, she who cannot save him from his life.

Mary cares for an ill old woman, never believing she will be one.

Mary meets the wolf. Mary bites the apple. Mary hears the horse head nailed to the gate, singing a song, mourning her fate. Mary grows her hair.

Mary wants to sleep in a glass coffin, in an enchanted castle for a thousand years. If only her son could go with her, the one who is not yet born. The one who will become king. Why do they need him so much, these peasants and cooks, soldiers and servants? They will rip him apart with their wanting.

She would rise for his cries. She would hold him and hold him, like so.