

Late Fall

Diane Swan

It's hard to tell birds
from wind-rushed leaves
as they skirl up in the funnels
of blinking October light.

The women have been cooking for weeks,
their fingers are full of bandages,
the pantries swollen with harvest.
But today as they stand at the sinks
crows that hollered spring
hurl their other word.
Soon it will all be taken—
what was blighted and what ripened,
what flew or could only fall.

In the glass, each sees she has grown
slimmer more elegant—patina
of driftwood, bare tendons
of the dying elm. *I am too old
and beautiful to be a servant only.*
In the yard she finds a daughter
raking mulch over the cooling gardens.
*Go inside, she whispers,
Take your turn at the stove.*