

KATHLEEN FLENNIKEN

To Ease My Mind

If I woke as Mary Todd Lincoln

and if Abraham Lincoln slept next to me
like an uprooted tree, his knobby fingers

unearthed, his face a burl,
grey as a Mathew Brady photograph,

and if my country were at war,

my own cousins killing my cousins,
and I'd been told to tear the country's

damask down, shred its opulence
to bandage the wounded but

I knew it was hopeless, hopeless,
there'd be no stopping the blood

of filthy, putrid common men until
every human left had lost a child, a leg, an arm

and if I'd already given everything,

if I'd given over my grieving husband—
not without kicking and screaming—

and the birds were silent
to mark the never-ending end,

then God forgive me, perhaps I too
would turn my mind to the pleasures

of kidskin gloves adorned with pearls,
embroidered daisies and chrysanthemum

stars, white on white filigree so fine
one might believe a fairy tatted them.

I might need box upon box upon box of them
to tell me who I am.