Fairy Tale · *Carol Muske*

In that country sacred to the wolf,
the mill no longer grinds out
its dull bread and duller proverbs.
The unshepherded flocks complain
in the empty fields. In the dead
branches sit crows too exhausted to fly.

It's November, as it has been for years.
In the kitchen of the lonely palace
one chop hobbles into the skillet.
The barrel staves split, and stack.

High on the landing of the great staircase
above the ballroom, the chandelier
rattles its glass skeletons and
the cobweb's drawn back:

here is the illegitimate daughter of the king
standing the way she stood
the night he banished her,
cold-eyed, her grey cloak slipping
from her shoulder as she strikes
her open palm with the butt of the riding crop—

to emphasize each point she is making.
According to the story—it is her job,
now that she's back—to make the leaves
regrow, to unfreeze the waterfall.
Why does she wait?

All she has to do is speak the ancient name
of each predator
and he will open his eyes,
walk on his hind legs through the gate,
looking right and left, clean-shaven,
utterly certain of a second chance.

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