

Pears · *Mary Swander*

Dipping each nail
in grease, she hammers
a porch around her house
so no one will see her
come or go, but I
stand here knocking,
the sun pouring
through the glass,
my back warm as the flame
in the stove she keeps
burning summer and
winter to drive
away evil. And no one
sees her slip through
the door, the walls
like sod, holding out
the heat, the rain,
and no one answers
my call as she slides
deeper into the far
room. She leaves
her shoes on the cellar
stairs and the mud-caked
soles dry into
their own faces,
dry into the shape
of the pears rotting
on the shelf. The light
fades into the wall,
into the cistern filling
with sand and stone.
The light fades
into the fence posts,
clothesline,

the heartwood of the pear
tree fallen down
behind the shed,
there to be chopped
for the stove inside,
there, where for days
I stand in her shoes
with an axe and do not
feel the rain, do not
hear the blossoms forming,
do not see them burn white
deep inside the walls
of their own stems.