

Black Jellies, Eggs, and the Pearling of Ovaries

CATHLEEN CALBERT

The fire is stoked, kindling set in triangles.
Black jellies are sealed with wax, and loaves
of bread air on racks. Frost-cold, I am living

in an old house, and I have been dreaming
of winter's wolves, of my discovered body.
My herb garden shivers on the windowsill

until basil falls into the sink, harvesting itself,
and fennel floats in a slender bowl of milk
to lead all snakes away from my aspirations

for the egg swimming to the top of the cup.
A kitchen of miracles! I spoon up dreams
of his past lovers, reciting three times,

"To open my lover's eyes," as I close mine
to see the pearling of ovaries. We are in love.
After his bed-boasts, his days of exile are done,

even though he believes he's fated to leave
and receives my offerings unaware, denying
the beauty of a kitchen window that opens

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onto the seal-bath, the whale-way, the sea,
claiming that I have no power of prophecy.
Poor lamb, he's been sick, he wants to sleep.

He needs to rest before he mends and leaves,
so I kneel with my salve of water and ash
(a bad twist as he tumbled from the sheets).

He turns gray and cold, but I know what I'm doing.
He asks with an old sweetness, will I do the lay
of the nine twigs, so I place a petal on his lips

and squeeze his palm in the softest spot.
I will give him a song of the future's face.
He wants to sleep. As I part my lips to sing,

he loosens in his regular love of release,
closing his eyes, manly, happy, planning,
not dreaming he can't sleep without me.