

Testament

A small woman lives in a flowerpot in my closet.
She hates light. Brandishes her fists
when she speaks. Not speaks—

mocks. She asks about my parents: *tell me a tragedy*.
I've practiced that tragedy.
But *this* is the truth:

I never feared him. I feared *her*—her radiance, her hymns.

My fear being resistance to the impossible.
The impossible, a woman who endured.

He never said one kind word to her.
My father, I mean. To my mother, I mean.

Where did she gather those *You are beautifuls*
for my sisters and me? How did she never empty of warmth?

The small woman in the flowerpot loathes
my mother's clean, clean bones.

She once dared me to spit in my mother's face.
(She didn't spit back.)

When I was fifteen, my mother found me
in a bookstore with a boy pressed against my body—his muscles,

his jaw. I *let* him mark me.
After years of raking her bruises
away from her daughters, *that* was the only night
my mother let me see her cry.

When God passed out mothers to all the beastly children
and wives to all the beasts,
how did he misplace my mother in that wrong pile?

And yet, her devastating joy. That rosy voice
insisting, insisting God *is* good.