

SLEEP LIKE A HAMMER

I rub the hammer I use to slaughter stock
with coconut oil,
while you sit, staring at your feet, clucking,
though you've bent your head,
so I can't see your lips move.
Father, I know you're thinking about your shoes.
Like the night the barn burned down.
My wife was sick. I was crazy for help,
but you sat on the porch
with your shoes in your lap.
I jerked them and ran. You followed
and when I threw them into the fire,
you went in after them.
I dragged you out,
and beat out the flames.
Now you just sit,
every so often lifting your hands,
as if they were holding broken glass
and I don't know what to do,
so I get the hammer and start oiling, oiling,
because it's not good to let blood
harden in the cracks,
but the cows, the hogs don't care,
even I don't. I just worry like a woman.
I need something to do.
When I was fifteen, you took the pregnant hound
hunting at flood time and she didn't come back,
but you did, your left arm broken.
You said she was no good anyway
and I kicked you hard.
You took the shovel from the barn
and smashed my leg. I still limp.
I raise the hammer.
I hear my wife yelling.
She's running toward me,

bucket in one hand, the eggs in it
sloshing over the top;
huge, white drops of water.
But she's in another country.
There's only you. Me.
When I bring the hammer down,
your toes splay out, snap off like burnt bacon.
Your lips pull back
and your tongue drifts over your teeth
and I'm moving up to your hands, shoulders, neck, face.
Lord, moving up.