

By Kate Adams

Shaking the sheets out one by one,
you fold them in half, in half, in half
again, smooth them flat with your hands.
Beige against white, the nails cut short
or bitten right down to the quick,
your fingers surprise me, agile as fish,
snapping the clothespins open and shut,
releasing their rusty jaws.

We talk a little, you glance at the darkening sky,
grateful for weather a little more
human, you say, a little more warm.
I want to tell you again how much it means to me
watching you folding and smoothing the sheets,
throwing the pins in the bag. I want to take you
by storm, like that water you broke for me.
But something much softer moves on your face,
something still frozen in mine—

You turn to the towels, my underwear stained, you say,
too dark even for bleach. Your voice tightens, or is it
my ears, something between us creaks
on its hinge.

I see you could snap me in two,
one half me, one you—

Or something more—human,
the heat of you searing my skin,
ripping the birth sack again—

I want to wound you more deeply still,
hear the rust rise in your voice.
You stand in late light, something snaps shut
in my mind. You want me
more perfect than you,

all the stains removed—

You fill the baskets with underwear, socks,
I sit on the grass uncut for a year,
watch bladed shadows thicken to dusk.
Everything folded, smoothed, you study
the sky, those evening planets you love.
They've been a pair now for months,
through the winter you hated,
this fitful spring. A triple conjunction,
you told me, meaning two planets
three times, meeting each other
on their shuttling paths through the sky.
It happens, you said, only once
in a long while, maybe a hundred years.

Your silhouette softens, bends to the baskets,
you take the first one in. I have discovered
an ignorance big as your sky,
how little I love you, how much too much.
You come back out, banging the screen door,
the door, bending again, not looking at me.
I cannot move or speak. You take the basket
in, those two planets brighten, approaching
the rim, the hour is shadows slipping past blue.

Banging and bending, you approach once more,
the last basket rises into your arms.
We are two shadows blue against blue,
this happens only once in a lifetime,
once in an afternoon. I have discovered
how little I know you, how much I lost
when you parted from me, and how much more
human we've both become, moving closer
and closer, here on the darkening rim. ❖