I think I remember my mother. White hands on needlepoint, the moon shining on clean bed sheets. Crushed raspberries in a bone china cup. I was so young, so quiet. I didn’t know the aviary secrets of the forest, the way birds will eat the trails you leave. What I knew of leaves was only what my father shoveled over the dirt of a dozen graves, and still I never wondered what it meant to die. That’s why I wanted to slip my hand into the witch’s hand, let her mother me with caramel. She smelled of burnt sugar and chocolate cake, unlike my own mother, who wore the kind of flowers no one can eat: daffodil, delphinium, the white hush of oleander.

Sometimes I dream she spoke to me through her fever, placing damp jasmine in ropy vines around my neck. *Press the poison to your lips,* she said, *and the petals will wax.* *They’ll violet your skin like a bruise.*

The truth is, when she died she said nothing, just breathed in and out until the metronome stopped. We turned away, crumbling bread in our hands, and walked toward the farthest edge of our yard.

So you could say I wanted this, that hunger cinched my ribcage until I went to find a new mother, safe in her house built of sweet violence and simple syrup. It’s true that I’d sacrifice anyone for the crack of sugar between my teeth. Whatever happens, I’ll pretend her last word was no.