Homesteading with the Ghosts

You taught me how to truss a chicken with only the stem of a rose, and when I bled you said I was paying respect to the animal.

What refused the dirt was suspicious—we were trying to live simple. You learned to feel for the wishbone with your fingers and bury it in the herb garden to dry out. Now, bones always smell like rosemary. Once, in a fit, you threw all my books into the irrigation ditch, where I found them later. It seems like this should have been beautiful, some sort of gift. Like the whip you left under my pillow, dust-caked.

Winters are easier, as we soften. Bleeding out a bird onto the dirt for dinner stains more than the thumbs. I study Gambel’s quails while you are sleeping, three in the morning, frost fingerling the windows. Polyandrous, females take multiple partners in a single breeding season.

They live in Mexico, which is the farthest away place I can imagine when it’s too cold to talk, and you are the only noise in the house.

Older females adopt the males’ plumage and crow like them underneath the mesquite, sound evaporating with the heavy wind.