

Before and After

In the courtyard of the sanatorium, the sick women
sit on benches upholstered with moss and silence.
In the dampness after rain, but before the next rain,
in the interruptions between frequent floods and washed-out
daughters, their hair becomes motionless
and stops applauding them, grows thicker
and thicker, matting and curling into long
curved handles, like those of scoured and greying
skillets. Peaks over their eyebrows hang
from nails above their heads, the pan-bottoms,
ringed with grease, concealing their lives.
Behind them, in the exhausted kitchen: fumes
from yet another round of eggs, frying
in sour and twice-used goose fat,
to be served up to life-times
of sharp-ribbed children, whose front teeth
fell out just yesterday,
between barrages of light artillery in the mountains,
after one house stumbled and fell down,
but before another house shrugs itself up.

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