

Judith Skillman

MOTHER'S COOKING

She's left the fish's head on
so it will bake slowly in foil, its milk eye
turning on finally like a light the timer
caused to open.

She's come again to my house where the bowl
cats drink from is yellow with brine, and as if
that weren't bad enough she's taken over
my wire whisk, the one

with one bad arc. Beneath her cool hands
the boiling point of water lowers, bubbles shifting
from small to big so effortlessly
that when we watch the pot

it seems to stare back at us, concentrated
like the light that shone from her face
as I remember it. A few bananas go bad
in a basket that once held flowers, gaining

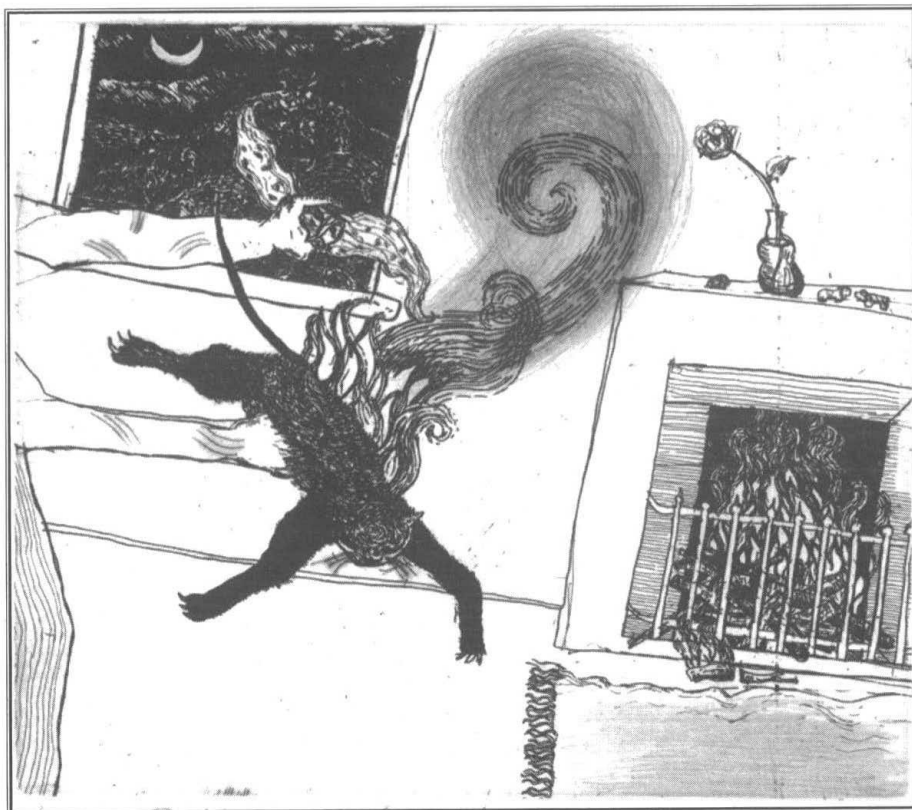
their spots gradually like an animal
I can't name, one she can't resist doing
something with. This will take up half the day,
as crowns of sugar and flour bare

their cannisters, and the sun pulls back
its twin robes under her surprising
influence. Never measuring anything,
but tasting as she goes, as if she knows

how much more the sum will be,
how weak the parts in their estimation
of her powerful canon, she dominates
without opinion all the secrets

that are left of the world: rivers
flowing with the hearts of nuts, a land
bereft of butchers, and the last chicken
seen wearing feathers a woman will pluck.

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"Putting out the cat".