The Measure of Things

God save the devils, afflicted
and tumored. Speech stalled
in their cursed throats. No one
will save them, though
the scientists are alarmed. O
save the foxes, pretty little foxes,
they are next. They feed on what
the devils leave behind. Islanded,
rotting mouthed. Perfection is not
for the faint of heart, perfection is
a holler that crosses the void
where the orchestra lives, picking up
speed in the atmosphere. No music
here, just the roaring of animals
extincting. Memory has no borders
for those who believe
they are unlovable. But here is the wide
open field: you promised
not to tell because you loved him.

Stitching a World

Bobbin with Prayer Beads: wood, ceramic, fur rope and steel, Millicent Young, 2005

She found herself having to rebuild from nothing.
Materials that were unknown/unwanted:
      strangers
      small children to raise
      a broken city

She hoped it would—but she had no one
to pray to—her faith in words to stitch
together meaning, to make a haven of, gone. A frayed
fur rope to the spirit world where *an idea of*
shimmered and sank in a shallow.

Ideals are so quickly abandoned: read the headlines. She thought
she was a _____/ She thought she knew
who she was—and now she finds herself
running, pursued by confusion and rage, turning
into branches, into bark—deadening her body and refusing
to speak, thinking it is her beauty that has done
this to her—(what else
is a god but an idea of perfection?)

These thoughts harden
against the grain, wood pulp splintering
her veins. Her flesh has become a pirate ship
filled with female prisoners and children—taking on water
just off the coast. There is no romance to it, this violent
circus in her arms, impossible
to explain. She needs the self-help language of the lumberyard. Panic
rides bareback along her skin as it thickens to bark.
Resignation slows and roots her.

She prefers her old life, resists the new
surroundings and as sound
stalls in her hardening ear, the echo of his cry
persists: *"What's happening? Where are your feet?*
                    Where are / your shoulders and your hands,
                    your face? I speak— / but everything you are keeps vanishing."

He shrugs, unpockets his simple tools, carves
his initials into her throat. She watches
him depart from across a chasm—
the *cotton wool of existence* / a widening story,
a forest floor of skitter and shadow
connected to others by separation—Daphne is a shadow in a forest
of shadows—nymphs punished over and over,
their hearts burling in *why bother* to avoid
the muscle memory of walking—the wind brushing their stride.

The forest is just wider than memory, just enough. The ocean is even wider.
The ship of state revising, stitching a new world.
She's good at surviving, enduring rains and high winds.

You believe your life will be
this way, then it's that way—and the idea of yourself—well, that's a stone bead
you roll on your tongue,
cooling your hot mouth, doubting what you are
here for. How could you have been so sure before? So terribly young?

She has been an imposter for such a long time, her true nature abandoned
and gone numb under the slow plane of his hands
whittling her down
to a list of unfinished household chores.

Under this version is another:
rings of time since the forest tangled, darkening with kudzu blocking
the light: deceptive beauty along the Beltway—her life
before—spun out on a thread
spooled from the unremembered: the Goddess

chewing on laurel leaves for prophecy and guiding her people to shelter
from storms from the West. Traffic stalls on the highway
as flash floods take the riverbed. The book told her to locate
the fear, and she did—each bullet
moving through the city's wards of children
reminds her of a jet bead on her grandmother's rosary.

You can pray if you want to, but the wind
makes its own halting pleas and the trees
respond with a profound, quiet stillness—standing witness
as you thread the needle and finally
enter this moment.