

## **Trial**

Quick to scuttle in with the cattle sick,  
or an ankle twisted fat on a root -  
the caps wrung flat by fiddling hands  
would reach the moon lined end to end.  
*A divot, lady, in the cloud to let  
the rain come through, and the fields relax.*  
*A cold poultice for the manor child,  
her sleeping cheek pink as a slap.* This  
is the hook you hang yourself on. The pocketcloth  
stiff with dried herbs. The words you keep  
beneath your breath. They'll remember  
the night in the dark barn, a driving wind,  
and you, red to the wrist. Forget how you freed  
the eely slip of lamb, bloody jumble  
of new life coaxed by your fingertips.  
The village beds are heavy with husbands,  
charmed to keep their buttons up  
and eyes to their wives. Perhaps  
it was the mistresses – they say  
a woman scorned. They wear their crosses,  
murmur in the back. Not a thigh among them  
nettled by whiskers. Not a prickling kiss  
to be had in weeks. How do I plead?  
To the moon, your honour, for gentling.  
And the lick of flame for speed.