

## Warning

Because of an anger I will never understand,  
my sister took the bottle of maple syrup from the fridge,  
unscrewed the cap & emptied it over our childhood portraits.

That summer, I was so thin I wore sweatshirts  
no matter how hot it was outside.  
After my sister stuffed the sticky photos  
to the bottom of the garbage,  
I gunned the Garden State Parkway with my mom  
to escape from it all.

At our beachfront hotel, I continued the war  
with my body, twirling angel hair pasta—  
so pretty, snarled in the tines of my fork.

*I'm not hungry*, I told Mom,  
while my sister would not stop  
phoning to say she was sorry  
she was so damn sorry—she'd wiped our sweet faces  
clean & taken the trash to the curb.

The next morning, jellyfish covered the sand  
like glass, & Mom & I chatted about everything  
but what was happening. Wary of being stung,  
we couldn't risk lifting our eyes  
as we walked into the ocean.

# The Year Before

*Wheelock, Vermont*

After work, I traded my heels for boots  
& got down on my haunches  
to feed the hens in the coop.

They preferred when I was on their level.  
Most days, I took my place at the table  
with dirt on my face.

Though your dad installed a stove  
to warm the henhouse through the winter,  
their beaks & claws could turn blue,

drop off. In dreams, the stove caught fire  
& devoured the coop. I distracted myself  
by making my body useful.

He showed me how to drill the trunks  
& run the lines. The trees would ooze  
when temperatures rise.

In your absence, the sugar house boiled.  
All spring long, I returned my paychecks  
to the company I worked for by buying

the clothes I wrote about for their catalogue.  
I knew those cashmere sweaters  
better than anyone. Besides, I missed you.

Come summer, you returned to me,  
& the beehive reached full capacity.  
Mourning doves mated while the woods echoed

with hunters' shots. I wore an orange cap  
& vest on my walks.  
For weeks, the flutter of wings & feathers,

the hum of insects & of course my choice  
of honey or syrup on the pancakes  
your family fixed every Sunday for breakfast.

In the garden, I pulled carrots & peppers,  
beans & heirloom tomatoes, but sometimes forgot  
about the snakes twisting the bases of plants—

I recoiled before I remembered they're just rubber.  
You'd put them there to fend off the birds & rabbits.  
I was here to pick the food that we ate.