Menka Shivdasani

Bird Woman

On one of those days when the key refused to fit the padlock, I turned myself to air and squeezed through the keyhole. It was bright outside, and I was tired of all the jostling women inside the house – Nomad, with her fraying suitcase, Devil Woman with her lacerated tail, and that sad little lady with her stained and grimy apron, who seemed so familiar, disintegrating in a thousand homes.

All these women, and a few more, were crowding in, and the keyhole that sat on my shoulder was at cracking point.

I knew I had somehow lost my way in the brightness outside, after all those years in a dank and dingy room. Stretching my legs was a strain and breathing was simply a whole new experience, but folded up behind my back I found some wings – who knew where they had been all those years? They were slightly dirty, but once I got used
to their rusty screech,
I found, strangely enough,
they worked.

I am making friends
with the birds now,
and discovered
I have talons too
which sink perfectly
into the eagle
with his beady eyes.

Breathing is still
a problem sometimes;
the breath comes
in gasps
and I almost forget
it is something one must
do all the time.
But the blue air
is warm and best of all,
I have left those
jostling women behind.

I couldn’t help it.
I know I let them down
and they are wondering
where their hostess
disappeared.
But what could I do?
They simply took up
too much space
in my head.