

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.