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JEANNINE HALL GAILEY

Case Studies in Revenge: Philomel Gives Advice

Trust me on this.
It turns to ash in your mouth.
(The cold air glitters above me.
I know what I know.
I've tasted blood.)

Like this one guy I knew who was in love with this girl—
a tiny, 90-pound thing who was always getting beaten up
by her boyfriend, who was seven years older
and huge. So one night this guy
(maybe sixteen, ghost-white, only 140 pounds)
waits outside the bar
where the boyfriend works
as a bouncer.
He pulls the boyfriend into an alley,
pushes him to the ground,
stands over him
with a metal bat.
Tells him he should kill him.
The boyfriend starts to cry
and the guy thinks, "Pathetic."
He still wants to kill him
but won't. The boyfriend pleads,
promises he won't touch her
again. The girl later complains
to this same guy that her boyfriend
won't return her calls.
(The glint from empty beer cans
still stacked on her dresser.)

And this other girl I know,
there was a boy who picked on her
in school, called her names because
her mom shopped at the wrong stores,

she ate lunch with the wrong people,
had the wrong accent, etc.
She hated him and prayed
he would die. Two years later
he gets thrown through a windshield.
His best friend got leukemia.
She alone survives. Now she's afraid to hate,
but dresses impeccably.
(She grips the steering wheel with white, white hands.)

And this other woman
she married young (in a white minidress
she holds white roses) a man
who bullied her, threw chairs at her
and she lived with it eleven years
and swore when her children were older
she would leave him. But then she fell
in love with him again
(his guitar music, his desire for only white cars)
and stayed another eleven years.
Her kids say she's nuts.

When I had my fill
of revenge, I began
making music. It tasted sweeter.
(The air's edge like a knife in my feathers.)