

Peony picker
Claire Kieffer

Both my grandmothers were farmers,
Daughters of daughters of farmers.

The tip of my fingers know by heart
where to find letters on a keyboard

but not the heartbeat of spring
in the good black earth. It was never

a question whether I should earn
my living by my hands or my head.

Like a lover with amnesia
I harvest in fields of peony

and lavender the lessons
I had forgotten, clumsy.

When I tell my mother, she
already knows - she, who I shamed

in front of my teenage city friends,
kept her wisdom a secret. Still,

a farmer's stance lives in my hips
and I love lifting things too heavy

for me. An old ancestress beats
where coal is coaxed into fire and

even before, my teeth were planted deep
as standing stones to rip flesh off bone.

My first grandmother was a mountain
who woke up. Her wrinkles were rivers,

age was her beauty. The boulders she bore
shaped the hollow between my shoulders.