I am no invalid to be hung,
suspended amid steam & garbed
in brown like a wilting
champignon, & I am not Quality,

anointed with pomatum,
chalked face & hair achieving
architectural heights. I must be
like you, Fanny, or else

some new genus altogether
& sick for home. Paint me
meticulous, color-washed shade
of pistil & stamen outlined

in firm, accurate black. Linnaeus
knew even the wildflowers,
whether foxglove in Charlton-wood
or violet in a watery ditch,

must reproduce like men.
What I know is your hand, pressed
to mine. How it opened me
like a tender mouth, & gasping.
TAKING LEAVE

Mary Wollstonecraft, January 1784

We sway in its dimness, two dancers. 
There’s no going back, I say to Bess,

not now. The coach rolls along Church, 
crossing the river & Meredith 
by now must surely know we’ve flown.

Like a fury, Bess’s hair, a plaited 
& coiled nest of snakes—only pray,

let her shed this madness like a skin 
that’s grown too tight. Knuckle to mouth she bites her wedding ring 

to pieces, sighing for that poor brat 
we’ve left behind. My fisted heart’s 

fierce heat throws beating wings 
against its unforgiving cage. No words 
for what he’s done to her, save 

the ones men give us. No way 
for a man to rape his wife. There’s no 

going back, she says. Then it is 
time to switch the coach. By Hackney’s 
garden nursery, we rush from one
to the next. The smell of camellia, fern, & rose filling the folds of our cloaks.
Coulomb’s Law

Mary Wollstonecraft in Lisbon, 1785

I give the docks my back.
The river’s surface is troubled,
a grave’s muddy lid.

It's opened before as if on
a hinge, tsunami baring a floor
of lost cargo, of shipwreck.

Of thirty-year-old bones. I know
you labor unfinished, flowing,
all sweat & tears. I’m coming.

Fissure & split, I will midwife
you, the heated charge
leaping from your skin to mine,

the cage of your ribs flaring
hot as ruined Convento de Carmo’s
exposed & sun-fired arches.

Birth & death, it’s all the same:
a difficult passion whose laws
flush the cheek & ruddy

the thigh. Like a forced bloom
you will sprout, Fanny Blood,
unfolding brilliant as your name.
CONFINEMENT GHAZAL

1. Like my great-aunt’s crochet hook, it is plastic. Slipping it in, the resident tugs & my legs flow slick with clay.

2. In 1797, the body opened itself to science. Men fingered cadavers & sank wrists deep into birth canals, unclean.

3. Restrained & in pain, we are built for labor, petty thieves straining amid our stained & russet bed-clothes.

4. Mary Wollstonecraft shivers in sepsis, shaking. Then the puppies are on her, pulling milk from glutted breasts, eyes closed.

5. Crotch shaved, chloroformed, they strap my mother down, slice her open, & pull me free, pinced in a metal claw.

6. Push, Rebecca. The doctor readies his knives & it is as if the hand of God himself is there to set me screaming.