

In the House of Babi Yaga

She never asked to be brought here - to this house
perched on the edge of the valley. Outside,
a menacing poplar blocks the sun. Inside,
the walls are papered with bamboo, floral carpets
swirl, the divan is olive green, velveteen.

She remembers her soiled shorts on the wooden
draining board, the butter pat that left red welts
across her calves. Her mother's sickness was a
storm that raged open the dawn curtains ordering her
to dust and polish. Envy called her ugly,
pulled tight her tangled hair. Mistrust screamed
on the midnight doorstep, calling her liar and slut.

She pockets her voice
alongside her small rag doll Vasilisa,
swallows her secrets like forbidden sweets.
She imagines a palace under the sea, draws
comfort from the patterns of waves and shells. She's
a princess waiting for the spell to be broken.