

Seven Feet Wide

In high school, a great blue heron
dropped a catfish into my family's garden.
Mudscales thrashed against the thyme
and then it died staring at me with
one penny eye,
because the catfish understood that
I had just cut all my hair off, and
cool September air was rushing the back of my neck
as if I, too, had been dropped from a great height.

We ripped up the herbs after that,
and never refurbished the leftover dirt beds. Even still,

my mother sometimes said to me:
*You will know you truly love a man
when you want to share a garden with him.*

Which I did not understand at the time.
I knew I was not a man, but still I
cleaved the femininity from myself
as closely as hair may be cropped to the skull,
grand as the great blue heron's wings, which can,
in exceptional cases, span up to seven feet wide.

If my shoulders were seven feet wide,
I would not drop into thyme gardens.
No, I would peck the eyes from my lovers.
Mother, may I peck the penny eyes from my lovers?
If I collect them like seed after rotten seed
to grow a bed that I may one day die in?

You are a girl, my mother sings back, by which
she means to remind me that in this fable,
I am always the fish,
and her tone implies that I have made it much harder
for myself by swimming upstream.

And I think what I am trying to say is that
I am twenty one years old.

I come home to potted plants and a roommate
who feeds me persimmons, and I find her hair in my laundry.
I ask if I am a woman,
to which my mother sings back
Not yet, not yet.

But mother -
Did you know that even still
I am loved?