

As a child, I climbed trees,
pressed lips to branch,
peeled back bark

to expose
pale wood-flesh.

My mother, the realist, would watch me
cradled by chinaberries
dangling one-armed
and she'd tap windows to draw me down;
she did not trust the earth,
not like a child can.

I stripped boughs for swords
to fight off bees
and ants, the monsters
of my primal flesh memory.

I buried my feet in sand
and asked, of course,
for tallness. I wished for branches
and birds' nests and

I whispered to dead leaves,
gave them each names
(these repeating often,
as there were billions)
and gave them sanctuary
under my bed,
on the windows

and when I grew older,
I scattered them all across Florida,
as much a mother to them
as their own. ▲