

KIRUN KAPUR

## Nursery Rhymes (or The Time She Chased My Mother with a Carving Knife)

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All around the cobbler's bench,  
you, Mother, who were taught  
to overlook the stench of last night's gin,  
to kneel, say prayers over all your sins,

but the glint of the knife was louder  
than anything Mother Superior,  
Mother Goose said, louder than crinoline  
and rings and the ticking of heels on linoleum,

Jack be nimble Jack be quick, don't be afraid  
you'll slip, fear eats up time, eats candle sticks,  
the chime of your childhood will find its silence,  
quietly untie, like a shoelace—Oh, Mother, may I

stand between you and my grandmother,  
you and you not being my mother, I believe  
it was the holy ghost of me, there in the foyer,  
dining room, kitchen, in the living room blocking

her drunken way, keeping her from falling  
on the knife, keeping you 20 paces ahead  
whispering, *hush little baby don't say a word*,  
someday you will buy me a mocking bird,

which will turn out to be a parakeet I name Anela,  
Hawaiian for *angel*, but first we must go  
all around the mulberry bush, mulberry bush,  
mulberry bush, it was too early for me

and you still had to be the daughter, but I was  
the spirit pushing the closet door shut, begging,  
stay hidden a while longer, then open the door to me,  
I'm coming to you angry and blind as mice.