

HISTORY

*She woke up old at last, alone,
bones in a bed, not a tooth
in her head, half dead, shuffled
and limped downstairs
in the rag of her nightdress,
smelling of pee.*

*Slurped tea, stared
at her hand--twigs, stained gloves--
wheezed and coughed, pulled on
the coat that hung from a hook
on the door, lay on the sofa,
dozed, snored.*

*She was History.
She'd seen them ease him down
from the Cross, his mother gasping
for breath, as though his death
was a difficult birth, the soldiers spitting,
spears in the earth;*

*been there
when the fisherman swore he was back
from the dead; seen the basilicas rise
in Jerusalem, Constantinople, Sicily; watched
for a hundred years as the air of Rome
turned into stone;*

witnessed the wars,

*the bloody crusades, knew them by date
and by name, Bannockburn, Passchendaele,
Babi Yar, Vietnam. She'd heard the last words
of the martyrs burnt at the stake, the murderers
hung by the neck,*

*seen up-close
how the saint whistled and spat in the flames,
how the dictator strutting and stuttering film
blew out his brains, how the children waved
their little hands from the trains. She woke again,
cold, in the dark,*

*in the empty house.
Bricks through the window now, thieves
in the night. When they rang on her bell
there was nobody there; fresh graffiti sprayed
on her door, shit wrapped in a newspaper posted
onto the floor.*