

JANET BARKHOUSE

A MILLION GRAINS

—for Susan

Put your life in water and take it out—ripples
smooth away like sand sketches as the tide comes in.
You ironed a thousand shirts that way, a thousand sheets,
as carefully as if you were soothing the child your stepmother
wounded, wiping the crazy away. Stable-girl, nanny,
keeper of hens, you loved your Cotswolds life,
honey limestone walls marking careful territory,
holding ancient peace. So you held
your secret death, pronounced more than a decade ago,
silent as the salmon you fished, cast after cast,
your deft hands releasing tired monsters
back to their underwater lairs.
Each of a million grains
rolls over and over, hermit crabs ride the tide.
The salt of tears you asked me not to shed.
The ones floating my heart.