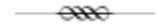


Elegy

Ilya Kaminsky



They say so much sky in her chest addicted her.
They claim, with inappropriate laughter, she requested

to be locked in a bird house, refusing to believe in silence
Sonya Barabinski goes to the Opera with chickens in her pockets.

She bites a hole in an apple and in that hole
she pours a shot of vodka.

She drinks from the apple in turn, to our health!
—just before her death—Sonya

announces: *I will become a government musician*
whispering: *Better one of them should*

die than one of us—

in the chill and iron heart of cobblestone street every woman she meets

comes forth to kiss her face.
Every mother buried just east of town, an honest place

to drown, quiet homegrown bodies
lie down. Under this earth, she is no less blessed.

Those still alive must raise their hands.
She sets off for the beach, on foot, a good mile

and a half of wind,
a vodka glass in her pockets, and when the bottle is empty

she drops her striped dress and walks, her mouth open, into the sea.
“Boatswain, I am your daughter! I let this water

fill my lungs’ whisper: boatswain, I am your pregnant daughter.”

