To Fanny Mendelssohn

Laura Donnelly
In the low egg yolk morning she is trying to dissolve the barlines, mathematical placements with which she is told she lives too much in her mind. She wants this to feel like song, possibility become effortless. A field. The robin's chitter.

But each morning the family's piano-forte slides further out of tune (she hears it). Each morning in the picture window the rhythm of practice-room, strangle-hold. (But no—was that me? What she feels, how to say?) I imagine an opaque window, sunlight through waxy paper. Someone says these distinctions dissolve, but I'm not so sure.

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Her brother visits from Vienna. She paints watercolors. Pale spring hills, the lake valley, beside her the water jar clouds over blue, aqua, gold, the brush shaken clean between colors. It is not a bad life. Her brother's *Songs Without Words*, of which many are hers, are publishable with his name. Queen Victoria's favorite, "Italy," is Fanny's own.
She gives concerts at home,  
notes echoing over marble like 
neat, heeled footsteps I hear through my college’s corridors.

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So many writers on hands: *Her small neat hands.*

*Her white hands.*

*Her marble hands.* He fell out of love 
*because her hands appeared larger* (no lie).

I’m beginning to think the mechanics 
mean little. I sit in the heat of August  
watching how hands work.  
Science of the smallest joints

dothat do or do not do my bidding by rote. In the end  
it only works when you learn to forget.

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And what if not remembered, not written, not graphed 
on the music staff’s bars like those leaps once  
charting my own heart’s beat? (Even  
as a child I knew something was wrong, lying on the bed  
while the EKG jolted off 
rhythm, off kilter, what kept me on edge—)  
What if in sleep, in first waking,  
in those colors of the water jar blurred,  
the lake’s depths and murmurs,  
it’s blue eye merging  
towards grey still swirling  
around the brush bristles I shake? What if, so worried  
(than) to get it right,  
scale after skeleton scale and so far from the flesh  
of the piece—I only begin  
to know what it was I heard—