

LINDA SILLITOE

Waiting for Lightning

Again I am the child hunched into a tense ball
in bed on Christmas morning,
breathless with frogs trampolining
my stomach, for the house to wake,
the curtained French doors to break
open on a storybook scene—and the Doll—
sensing the texture of crisp, golden hair
on my cheek where my own lank brown
slides, want thumping like a snake down
my throat; knowing the year has been hard,
estimating price, perceiving Santa, God,
and significant prayers, convinced the doll won't be there
shining with open arms beneath the miraculous tree;
yet my child's hope insists it must be,
adding farfetched possibilities
this way and the other, summing
opposite results in the torture of waiting.
That longing shook other mornings until I grew to be

adult, which means: you don't desperately want
what you're not able, yourself, to get.
Yet, longing, I stand shivering and wet
beneath this enormous willow,
taking part in a violent summer downpour,
swallowing cool air like a tranquilizer as flowers flaunt
and shimmy fertile blooms, earth freshens. Trying
to trust in the inertia of living cells, I'm again
a throat-hurting, soul-scheming ten
yearning for a silky head beneath my chin.
Then let thunder be my voice in this barbarous din
berating the specters of hell! the rains be my prayer, crying
persistently to heaven, million-tongued, as my own
sticks on helpless teeth, silently counting
signals and signs (for lightning stays wild), adding
the unlikelihoods this way and that
of my willow toppling, leaf-steaming and sizzling flat
pierced by an off-chance, afraid in my heart that it can,
it can.