

Sarah Crossland

## The Rake

In *The Kalevala*, when Lemminkäinen drowns  
in the black river of the Dead Land, his mother  
asks the smith, Ilmarinen, to fashion her a rake.

A son will not remember what his mother  
warned—only when the dog-violets grow

from tin, when stairstep fern and crowseed  
prosper out of copper. Grief blooms nothing

but more thoughts: sorrow steels in us, the mothers  
of boys, splints the bones that have no other

bracing. What could I do with his drowning, but run  
with the animals, through the swamp of hanging

veils? The grass sang with my speeding,  
and at last, I came to the smith's. Smoke told

his hut; already he had begun to forge the handle  
of an iron rake. *We long for the lost*, he said,

*as the cormorants dip for shadows  
of a fish who swims too deep to spear.*

My teeth took all my words. By morning,  
the rapids tigered with light, shearwater skated

the river he took to. I waded in to my waist.  
The rake's prongs caught all they could: bone-

buttoned stockings, his fox-brimmed trapper hat.  
The combers left, among other things, his eyes

bruised the color of a ship. Who then, I thought,  
would watch over winters with me? I gathered

*Kestrel*

my bees to fly across the nineteen seas. Tin  
needles, soundly thread—what more

do the dead need, excepting breath,  
to live again?