

Bricks

by Beate Sigriddaughter

Silence.

There are things we must not say.

There was a time when the law said
a woman who speaks out
against a man shall have her mouth
crushed with fire bricks.

There was a time when the law said
adulterers must be bound
and thrown in the river, even
a woman who was raped.
Her husband could pull her out
of the river, if he so desired,
while the king himself
could save a man he valued.

I am tired and heavy with things
I must not say. This silence slides
like grains of broken brick
between my teeth.

Arthur, with affectionate regret,
did not choose Guinevere
over law or flames. Would you
pull me from the river
if they tossed me there
against my will?
That is the question.

Oh, I remember: I am not
supposed to take things personally.
But I am the daughter of daughters

of women who were miraculously
neither drowned nor burned.

They have trained me with such memory
that you no longer have to crush
my mouth with bricks. All you have
to do is look at me a certain way.

This silence is not easy to undo.
How I hate this silence.

