

# Substance

by Peg Duthie



Image: "Untitled" by Kari Gunter-Seymour. "Substance" was written by Peg Duthie for *Rattle's* Ekphrastic Challenge, December 2018, and selected as the Artist's Choice.

I blame the malevolent fairy  
tales where the princess  
always presents a creamy complexion—  
porcelain, silk, satin, dewy  
as unblemished petals—bah.  
And fie on fathoming witches through  
the coarse-and-homely-as-cartons pelts  
of women earning their crow's feet,  
scaring thieves away without straw men.  
The muscle and mastery needed to stir  
sludge into sustenance, and then to scrub  
the kettle clean enough for brewing cures—  
why is it when boys play with powerful  
powders and brines, it's honored as chemistry  
rather than cooed at as cookery  
or cursed as conjuring? This is not  
the province of unformed chicks.  
Let me show you  
a shape of a happy ending:  
not the visage of a white washed egg  
but the graying angles and curves  
of a tested cradle,  
the invisible hands  
that clean up whatever's after.