

Melissa Ostrom

Conservation

In you, a chestful of nearly: knitting unsecured with a casting, greenware unfired, winesaps in December's tree, left to rot. Choose a failure. Watch them go. They do not take the brimming with them. All yours and irreconcilable. You've tried. Quickly, stow it. Insulate the attic, caulk the cracks, seal the rim joist cavity in the cellar. Make your recovery airtight. Friends will visit and remark how well you are doing. You will act better, optimistic, say things like, *Home improvements require a wreck*. So does a good story. Next year, you will install copper plumbing. You will do it on Valentine's Day and smell blood on your skin. You will work hard to keep it together. For now, see to the outside. The foundation is crumbling. Rocks the size of fists lie in heaps, as if men, punished with dismemberment, lost defiant hands before losing their recalcitrant lives. You can learn from these casualties. Some projects you must finish on your own and work out in your mind, with no help, no tools, no friends. With nothing. Not your broken body.

Melissa Ostrom teaches English at Genesee Community College, and is the author of *Unleaving* (Macmillan, 2019) and the YA historical novel *The Beloved Wild* (Feiwel & Friends, 2018). Her work has appeared in *The Florida Review*, *Quarter After Eight*, *The Baltimore Review*, and *Passages North*, among other journals.