

Marie Naughton

The Distaff Side

The next time I told her
I steeled myself—after
the first time, I half-knew what was coming.
Her mouth fell open and the clock
on the cooker ticked
a countdown.

Are you certain?

The same question her mam asked,
twelve weeks after the wedding in 1958
when I was on the way.

Are you certain?

The selfsame question
posed by her mam's own mam in 1927,
before young grandma cancelled the passage
to New York on the *Mauretania*
and wrote a letter to Aunt Honora.
An apology—she was no longer free
to take up the position at the bakery in Queens.
I've seen her passport photo and another,
maybe six months later,
with her baby son.
His eyebrows pull together
in a frown.

She broods like Etna
which erupted, incidentally,
the following year, laying waste
the village of Mascali.

The last time I told her,
the telephone would save me
from the drama,
so I thought.
In the silence
I couldn't help but picture her,
mouth dropping
like a trapdoor
under the convicted prisoner's feet.