Injury
At the Berlin Rathaus Shoneberg Flea Market

Ingrid de Kok

All the dolls are bald.
Some heads are porcelain
some straw-stuffed cotton
others rubbery, cold.

A few are blind,
several stare across embroidered thread.
Some marble eyes, cobalt blue,
cannot close or cry.

If they had souls or skulls
there might be something heraldic
coiled inside, perhaps wings,
the caul of fallen seraphim.

Some arms are broken off,
stacked in a pile
for locking back if we can,
into torso sockets.

Necks are limp, held by string,
almost new-born floppy
but more like rabbits
hanging on a poacher’s peg.

Most are naked, sexless,
but one wears
a grey nightdress
and that makes it worse.
I watch them tipped
from a hessian sack
onto a long table
in the corner of the market

next to a stack of lightbulbs,
plugs, extension cords,
screws and spanners,
other small rusted tools.

The trader smiles, wants to make a sale.
But I hesitate, wonder to myself
why he buys and sells
spanners, plugs and dolls.

Perhaps he’s not a specialist.
He may be what he seems:
a poor guy in a threadbare belt,
collecting this and that.

If I’m half delirious
blame it on the weather.
40 degrees, slowing my breath
softening my brain.

I should stop stuttering
say clearly that I’ll buy a doll,
the one with pockmarked cheeks,
take her home on the train.

But I won’t be able to mend her,
make her well again.
I know that. Not here.
I would have to hide her away.