

JESSICA CUELLO

Dear Mother,

Labor, labor, little needfire.
You made a nursedom
for a speck of love.

You wrote a ream of neckverse
to stem your father's voice
raging through the walls.

He hanged your dog.
Mother meant penance
by the fire. Nine silent hours.

A secret is a sliver inside.
For you, love was mania
& compulsion, a nunnish

fever at your friend's
bedside. She died in
childbirth, the baby too.

This is my frantic voice,
the mind's *scratch-scratch*
that sits fireside with you.

I kiss your imagined hand,

Mary Shelley