

Spring 1976

Letter to John from Missoula

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LETTER TO JOHN FROM MISSOULA

for Peterson

There is bread in the oven, John; its smell
has eased itself completely
through this room, rich as the soup you described
once, a year ago, in a poem. For three days

last week, the air was white with snow
& no one could see the mountains. Today
it could almost be spring. Our dogs,

in the yard, are playing. From a window
behind us, the crippled girl
has been watching them. She hasn't been out
for days. I can hear chain saws,
the big rigs lugging down pine.
I can hear gunshots far off in the mountains.

How long has it been, not since beginning
with words, but the time you dropped a pheasant
twenty odd years from your eye?
A damn good shot: that bright fat cock
did not even let out a cry. Who's taken over
the white farmhouse in Tiffin? It matters

that it's all been behind us; that we're writing,
always, hunched within our dying & alive.
Tomorrow it's supposed to get cold,
so someone wheeled out the girl.

John, this is the worst of the news:
It's warm. She cannot feel weather
in her legs. Her mouth is hanging open.
Her mouth is always motionless
& open.