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## For Your Sister

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## FOR YOUR SISTER

You turn down the long drive lined with crab apple,  
the seed and pulp-smear'd gravel like a trail.  
You find your father behind the white fences,  
his finger cut clean last year by the saw  
in the musty, jar-filled basement, sewn back now  
in ragged stitches, pointing at the peach tree,  
the pawpaw, spring transplants.  
Your sister, forty years, like roots  
along the river, shafts of pine, your sister  
who never married, who won't leave him,  
is ankle deep in compost and charcoal,  
is lifting the bandaged peach into the hole  
the plum tree made coming out, the shovelful of dirt  
mounded at her feet, his hands motioning the thick  
air from side to side.

You call to her past the hanging ox yoke, the clothes line  
strung with plaids, the strawberry plants.  
You call her name, on strike against your father's ear,  
the sound his body tries to make him understand,  
the white head shifting toward you.  
You watch his arms rise, the fingers shrunken,  
feet settling in the tightly sewn grass,  
eyes lifted in the shadow of the sweat-rimmed hat,  
in recognition. And it all comes back to you,  
the year the cattle stuck their faces in the mud  
and wouldn't lift themselves, the barn loaded to the rafters  
with manure, the fields lined with posts, barbed wire,  
fields of corn and soybeans and clay,  
and no rain in sight for months.

Full-faced, dirt-smeared, your sister turns toward you,  
arms limp and brown as quail, heads popped off,  
the brush and woods on fire and the birds darting out,  
the bottoms of your shoes slick with blood.  
She comes through the garden marked for tilling,  
broken sticks and bits of paper, rock piles.  
Rows of string arch back to the fences already heavy  
and blue with grapes, and behind the fences  
fields of corn as tall as school children,  
tassles of silk rising above their heads;  
then rows of husks like blond braids, the corn  
thrashed down; and behind your sister, the fields empty again,  
notched with hail and rain, and your father's chair  
still in its place against the porch.