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## Last Gray Scene

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## LAST GRAY SCENE

Didn't the sky take all of it, the man  
you'd slash your skirts for, night after night,  
the room eating bowls of dust in a house  
no bird needing a home would enter.  
Someone was always leaving: father, husband,  
the daughter with auburn hair  
who'd brush and wind until the last pin flared  
like a match striking the wall. In the papers  
a woman confessed to stoning the face of her child,  
the child, found beating her doll  
with newspaper. For a moment it's true,  
the year a train slapped the life out of stone.  
You helped your husband board,  
measured your life by the straight cloth  
of his back. You watched until his face dissolved  
like soap and the tracks thinned to water,  
the clear glass filled and emptied at breakfast.  
You stayed on, at night slamming a window with two hands,  
suddenly afraid to crawl the long corridor back  
from window to bed. Dinners felt the cold  
heart of an empty chair scrape the floor, the *amen*  
lifting fork to mouth and all of you  
tasting tiny explosions of meat.

Now a bird takes the empty house on its back  
and you bless house, bird, the mattress dumped in the yard  
refusing to burn. You rummage the porch  
for a pirate's dream of yellow brass,  
gold sent home to a woman's sunburned face, the parrot  
mumbling in his cage. Ancestors gave you this  
and you give it back, the scrub of rhododendrons  
where, twenty-five years ago, a bloodied cat  
stumbled into your arms. You give back the husband  
wiping his hands in the kitchen, the great-aunt pitching  
fruit trees and trunks of linen from a real train

in Custer, Wyoming. You give the horse  
traded for blankets and food, the leaf-mould  
scraped from his hooves with an iron  
spoon. Behind you a field coughs milkweed,  
stonecrop. Cattle drift toward a river  
pounded with snails and the river's boom  
where you warm yourself in the foreign breath of animals.  
Close the gate. Ignore the boy leaning hard  
at the window as you drive away.