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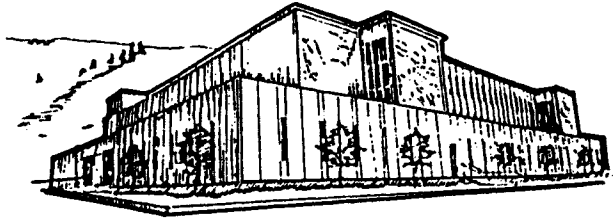
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May 3rd, 1994

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# WEATHER

by

Henrietta Spencer Goodman

B.A., University of North Carolina at Charlotte, 1991

Presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements

for the degree of

Master of Fine Arts

University of Montana

1994

Approved by

  
Chairman, Board of Examiners

  
Dean, Graduate School

May 6, 1994  
Date

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**"To be in love is like going outside  
to see what kind of day it is."  
—Robert Creeley**

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I

## Silk Trick

The man at the door  
has plucked and cleaned  
a pheasant. He offers it  
to me, his hands smeared  
with blood and feathers.  
Today my scars hardly show.  
When he asks my name,  
I say "Vanessa."  
I wedge the back of a chair  
under the doorknob  
and hang blankets  
over the windows.  
I have two beds. I take him  
to the one for sleeping alone  
but I lie down beside him.

In the morning he wants me  
to tell stories.  
"How will you know  
what's true?" I ask.  
I uncrumple my piece  
of red silk. It flutters,  
nearly transparent.  
I make it vanish and reappear.  
He asks where I learned how.  
I tell him I can't  
remember. He grabs  
my hands. I don't know  
if he's the same man  
as last night.  
His eyes are darker.  
The house is quiet.  
Every now and then the clock  
skips. He turns his face  
against my palm.  
What are these days called,  
these days I can't find  
on the calendar?

**Dialogue #1**

The man came to see the caverns.  
I put on my miner's hat  
and led him out across the field.  
He ran his hand along the dripping wall.  
Stop, I said. I gave my lecture  
about minerals. I had cracked pecans  
all day. My fingers were sore.  
I could tell he wanted to stay  
for dinner. He offered to reach  
into the stream and catch one of the eyeless fish.  
I was touching the switch.  
I could have turned the lights out  
any time. Then he wanted to see  
the bottomless pools. I broke the ice  
around the edges with my toe.  
He skipped a rock across the surface.  
It landed on the other side,  
in the moss. "What do you think?"  
I asked. I told him I'd dreamed  
I could pull the river up  
and cut it into strips, like ribbon.  
He asked if the pools were really bottomless.

I haven't washed my hair in days.  
It smells like old upholstery.  
The motel is cheap, orange bedspread  
and the TV nailed down.  
It's how I like it.  
I pull a stray end of hair  
to my mouth. I want to swim  
but the pool is stagnant,  
its walls an opulent green. Dead flies  
speckle the bottom. I wear my bikini  
anyway. In the courtyard  
grasshoppers bounce against the backs  
of my knees. Their bleached skeletons  
line the gutters.  
When the sun starts going down,  
I look through the drawers in my room.  
I want to find something extra,  
and use it. The man from the front desk  
knocks. "I need to seal some letters,"  
I tell him. I carve my name  
in the block of paraffin  
with a bent fork.  
I'm wearing my raincoat  
in case of splatters.  
The paraffin melts slowly  
in the coffee can over the burner.

We walk around the sculpture  
on moldy straw. He stands beside me.  
His skin smells like crushed oak leaves.  
This afternoon on the hot metal steps  
of the trailer I watched the shadows  
of bees. The Canadian children  
caught sandcrabs in their hands.  
Une, deux, trois—  
there is no such thing as a circle.  
When will he say something  
I can steal? Once I lived near the armory.  
When the tanks drove down my street  
a woman in a white slip ran out  
and held up a yellow sign.  
I never knew what it said.  
Where is the artist? I want to argue  
with her. I am in love  
but I keep trying to use the word “periphery.”  
In the water I stood on a rock  
and fish swam around my feet.  
You know how I feel about geometry.  
With one hand I touch his knuckles.  
With the other I scratch the wall.  
I knock hard on the metal box.

**Christmas**

I sat by the lake with a man  
I had just met. The stable  
floated in the fog on the water,  
walls of balsam, roof of dried moss.  
The moon had three rings.  
The man put his hand in the water  
and fish nibbled his fingers.  
When the stable moved closer,  
nuns in white habits leaned over  
the rear rail. They waved.  
A fish jumped. I waved back  
as they disappeared  
behind the island.  
The bakery had made fresh rolls.  
I could smell them.  
We were close.  
When the stable floated slowly  
back across the lake,  
the nuns were all kneeling  
inside by the manger.  
Their habits glowed in the twilight.  
I couldn't find my hat. The man  
looked surprised. "Be careful,"  
he said, "How many chances  
do you think you get?"

Vines reclaim the landscape but I'll people  
it yet. We sit on stumps in the front yard  
and drink. "Teeth are flags," he says  
when he kisses me. We balance a mattress  
on the beams of the second story, no roof,  
no floor. The bed sags where a big man died  
years ago. I can't sleep. I tell ghost stories,  
say I lived on this burned out side of town.  
Rope I drop sways in the dark. When I pull,  
it pulls back. "Your hair smells like Polish shampoo,"  
he says. One kind of soap, one shade of gray.  
My hair smells like smoke and snow. A fire  
truck leaves the Second Street station. From here  
we can see the bridges where the road breaks  
in waves. I need to know who has slept here  
since I left. Kudzu buried the big man  
but his shape stays. The dead trees are wolves  
like always. I look for our names on the walls,  
find this small blue bruise on my lip like ink.

**Mirrors**

He is up to his elbows in dried blood.  
"You should tear down the posters,"  
I tell him, "No one here will buy anything."  
He sits on Emma Lee's handpainted footstool  
and stares at the fire. The floorboards  
are splintered. "Calm down," I say, "Alchemy is too easy."  
How did I learn to talk like that?  
The house smells like turpentine.  
It used to smell like pepper.  
Once in the blue bedroom  
Emma Lee dried my hair. She curled it  
with a brush. After that my face was finished.  
Mirrors don't surprise me. He takes the pictures  
of the cousins out of the hall,  
leaves the gold frames. I hold onto his arm.  
"Practice looking afraid," he says.  
It's hard. We have enough dietetic candy  
to last as long as we want.  
On the backporch by the kiln,  
he drinks the last bottle of wine.  
I stay in the kitchen. I'm trying  
to blow eggs. I peel back the tablecloths.  
Around midnight he says it's time to go.  
We dance to music from the carousel  
across the street. "You'll forget,"  
he says. He leaves me pictures,  
but he's right,  
in those old dresses  
he looks like me.



## After the Knife Fight

A girl in a shiny bikini  
runs behind a pile of rocks.  
The car slides on gravel.  
She peeks out from behind a green sign.  
Frost glitters on her arms.  
I didn't do it, I tell her when she gets in.  
She smiles. Last time I drove this road  
I was not alone.  
Tom was in back drunk  
and Wendy sat up front pointing out antelope.  
Pull over, Wendy said just after we passed  
the plaster bull.  
She picked sage, barefoot, pulling hard  
on the tough clumps.  
I know it doesn't sound like much.  
The flag lady waves us to a stop.  
"We've got some belly dumps coming."  
In the car ahead of us, the driver  
scratches his neck,  
throws a pinch of salt over his shoulder.  
The wind picks up. He watches me  
in his mirror. "Don't worry,"  
the girl says, "See his scars?"

This time of year the sun comes early  
but we keep the curtains drawn  
in our room over the cafe.  
In the purple light she cuts out my stitches.  
A few days later there's a man downstairs  
with a garbled voice  
and a fur bag. He spreads a road atlas  
over the pie crumbs  
and makes me show him every place I've been.  
I think he asks if I like fried catfish.  
He traces the highways.  
The girl's eyes glow green  
in my high beams.

I remember this street. I remember  
the plaster wall where I stop to rest.  
My fingers throb. In the fighting  
a bullet grazed my ear. That day we walked  
in the forest he quoted Keats. She stood  
in tears amid the alien corn. I stood  
in tears while he poked the dead tiger  
with a stick, lifted the black gums  
to expose the teeth. "Une abeille,"  
he said, "that's what stung you."  
He smeared green ointment on my hand.  
In the bar I hardly recognize him.  
He orders a martini.  
He still has the stick,  
the end coated with tar.  
When I was a baby in a bar like this  
they gave me wedding cake.  
They beat drums. "It's my birthday,"  
he says, "the day of the dead."  
"I don't care," I tell him.  
Where is the dictionary that used to be  
on the bar? I used to know more words.  
He takes the maps from his pocket  
and spreads them out. "Los dias de muertos."  
Send me some red leaves from home.  
Show me some grief.

## Open Hand

This morning I see for the first time  
he has an artificial hand.

It glows, translucent and blue-green,  
bones like bike chain. The fingers  
bend like fingers. He comes back  
from the store with milk bottles,

the glass thick and bubbled. We drink  
the milk in bed, under the covers.  
I can't see out the windows for the crowd  
that has gathered at the foot of the bed.  
The women blink snow out of their eyelashes.  
The men kick their boots against the bedpost.

He has also brought a book with a yellow  
cover. Only he can translate the poems.  
The first is about a frozen waterfall.  
I want the crowd to go away  
so I can sleep. His hand glows in the dark.  
I can still see it, even when

I am on the long train past the women  
doing pushups in the square.  
Even when the man with the sword  
cuts the heads off all the statues  
and they shatter on the frozen ground.  
Even when he points the sword at me.

**Barbados**

Sara sent a letter. "It didn't hurt  
as bad as I thought it would," she wrote.  
In her room, a folding screen is painted  
with cranes stretching their necks  
toward dragonflies on waterlilies.  
From behind, she tosses a stocking  
over the edge. Sara, don't you remember?  
All the time we were swimming, the cave  
was underneath us. We dove five feet down  
and entered a green room veined with light.  
I unwrapped seaweed from your ankle.  
When we stood up on the rocks,  
the passing trucks blew their horns.  
We kept moving to stay warm.

Now I go there with him. He holds  
my foot in his lap and rubs my heel  
with a pumice stone. I ask for a story  
about lava. I can see the dark mouth  
of the cave at the base of the cliff.  
I don't know where the fear comes from.  
It's not the water. I'm not afraid  
of water. He says he loves to see  
me shiver. He never saw anyone so white.  
Sara, remember when you tried on my silks,  
looped my chain of bells around your waist?  
What are you doing? Why did you say, "Barbados,  
where the black men are so scary and ugly?"  
Sara, the water turned my rings gold.

**Not in awe, but—**

I've been trying to say something  
straightforward. At the lake  
we sat on the dock. I drew on the boards  
with chalk rocks. We watched the island.  
In my clearest moments  
I see things that aren't there.  
He turns his back to the window. An old man  
behind him looks in. I don't mean  
to be mystical. We shared  
a chocolate bar, a can of corn.  
Where is my persona?  
In my red gown I follow him  
along the railroad track.  
He leads me by the hand  
but I keep slipping, missing steps.  
I lie down. There. I'm safe.  
I want to make an analogy  
between myself and Ireland.  
It doesn't work. The sun's not up  
and already the preacher is out on the corner.  
Already I am suggesting guilt.  
At least indecision. It would be comfortable,  
now, to enter an alternate universe.  
I could let a man in a turban appear  
and say "don't eat the white berries."  
I could express concern about businessmen.  
No. It's not like that.  
He is more afraid of his grandparents' bed  
than I am.

**II**

- I. The branches clack. The pods  
rub together, dry and transparent.  
Most have three seeds inside.  
I've sat all afternoon  
peeling the layers, gathering  
the seeds in a little pile  
on the rail. Two crows peck  
the frozen ground. The body  
is divided exactly in two,  
by the limbs, by the lines  
of the chest and back.  
A train passes. I run my hand  
down my spine. It is farther  
than it looks to the edge  
of the yard.
- II. Last night a woman touched  
my hair. I can't stop thinking  
about it. A man took my hand.  
I'm trying to call all of it back—  
I walked across the bridge.  
The wind was cold. Pigeons  
flew off the roof of the movie house  
and out over the river. I walked  
with my arms folded. In the bar  
the late afternoon light  
was shining through the open door  
and the windows, glowing  
across the wooden floor.  
I remember now, that this is how  
most things start,  
in a light I know.  
And then come the bodies  
and the hands.

### Three Legged Race

I was better at the sack race, faster in the rising  
smell of burlap and grass. I could only win

the three legged race if I practiced ahead of time,  
hobbled my leg to another's and held on tight

until we could stride as one. Afterward,  
it felt awkward to untie my leg and walk alone.

It's twilight. The sidewalks are buckled  
with roots. What am I afraid of?

I had to be told to be amazed  
when the waves washed my green shovel

out with the tide and returned it the next day.  
I found it on the sand, beside a horseshoe crab shell

and some pieces of pink coral. "It's back," I said,  
and I sat down and dug a hole to watch it fill with water.



**Spring**

Even the snow in the shade is melting.  
Soon the hardware store will put out  
flats of tomato and pepper plants,  
bags of beans dusted with pink powder.  
I think I look relaxed, one foot  
propped on the porch rail.  
I don't look like I'm waiting.  
A girl rides by on a bike,  
fast over the bumpy street,  
her blond hair bundled under a scarf.  
I would be all right  
if I could stop that woman from calling  
every night to say rhymes in my ear—  
coat rack, rabbit track.  
She won't say what she wants.  
I hold the phone, try to grab  
the string that turns the light on  
but it swings over my head.  
She laughs and asks,  
"Are you there? Are you still there?"  
I'm trying to remember a song.  
People are all out walking  
with their children. Next door  
a man carves something small and ornate  
from a piece of oak.  
The clear air sharpens my ears.  
I hear sawdust falling,  
potatoes growing in their buckets.  
I hear bubbles from the mouths  
of the goldfish. The sun  
is just where it should be.

**Black Water**

- I. Nothing to do with the moon, this way of black water,  
decay, brine-soaked compost of last year's leaves,

this mirror that turns me upside down, shakes out confessions  
I never meant to make. You want me to lie for you,

fire one warning shot into the air. I make my fingers  
wrought iron, black grip of nails on palms, tell you no.

The bullet still falls somewhere. You made me stand  
in wet red light and watch the wreck and now I can't leave.

I'm beside a dying man. People wait  
in the car behind us. I tell them

I can't stay, that I'll find the path in the dark,  
crunch leaves like insects under my feet

and take the sign down. Then I'll go back to him  
but one of you with hands over your face has to come too.

- II. Some nights I think the fights start not over  
spilled drinks and uncalled shots, but because the current

surging through me loops out to ionize the room.  
You've said this is unreasonable. At least

I know when to stop watching, when a temple cracks  
on the corner of a table, knuckles sling blood,

bodies lurch to break the circle. We pour  
onto the street under a light that blinks

fast as an eye. We are severed. The light pulses,  
holds us still as we try to slip away.

## Horizon

To get here we have walked  
in our sleep  
past dark holes  
where animals live,  
cliff-caves,  
river canyons.  
Our eyes stop  
before the horizon.  
The shade of all  
we can't see  
falls.

The winter sun shatters  
windows. We sit  
with glass in our laps,  
grind it to sand  
or glue the pieces back,  
but the light is crooked.  
It turns corners.

A seagull circles  
the basin  
a thousand miles inland.  
The hills have rings.  
Salt crusts along the shore.

We follow a broken  
white line.  
Twilight and dust  
blur our vision.  
The water has risen.  
It strands us on mountaintops.,  
Lights we see  
in the valleys  
at night  
are noctiluca,  
stars  
in the swells.

What good does it do to go to the island alone?  
My windows rattle whether or not the train passes.  
I wake thinking dead man's pedal, a picket fence  
around the devil and his red pit. Then the long  
whistle. Dandelions grow large here. Under my chin  
they glow through any lie about forgetting.  
In their light I see the veins of my eyes.

Horses' hooves beat to the end of the island.  
In the store across the bridge, a man  
follows while I pick up bread. He rubs his scar,  
temple to jaw, and invites me to a party.  
My accent makes me look familiar. He grew up  
in Morganton. I almost ask if he knew John  
but the dates are wrong. I need a knife.  
All he has is a plastic spoon.  
When I cross the bridge again, the blowing sand,  
the white birds standing in the marsh like vases  
ask me to wait.

I was the conductor's daughter.  
On hot days I rode on the open platform.  
When I saw the black silhouettes  
of farmers, I always thought the sun  
was going down. From back east  
Karen sent me a piece of her hair.  
Ruthella, Maryalice, and Estella  
elected her treasurer.  
Sometimes after dark she puts on  
a kerchief and goes down the gully  
to eat with the hobos.  
She asks the hard questions—  
Are you home?  
Are you at home?  
Are you coming home?  
Once she asked me about beauty.  
Well, I said, daisies grow  
along the tracks.  
I used the word "malleable"  
though I knew she wouldn't know it.  
I said my pockets were heavy  
with melted pennies.

**Snowscape**

Urging me to think about God,  
he traces the letters on my forehead  
with his finger—GOD.  
In the crowded cafe,  
people turn to look.  
My lip hurts. Today I tried to sell  
my dresses. The light meter  
on my camera is broken.  
My pictures come out black,  
or bright in irregular patterns.  
You're missing something, he says.  
If you drive over the pass  
you need chains, or radials.  
You might have radials.  
We'll check in the morning.  
Delores and Veronica, remember me  
from school? You danced to a song  
I liked. What was the name of it?

After dinner we drink Sangre de Toro.  
I count the grains of rice  
left on my plate.  
Someone is always telling me not to move.  
The flash goes off. Of course I agree.  
I will try to forget where the grave  
is located, or at least mark it  
with something useful,  
like a windmill.

**Ghost Town**

This is what you believe in—  
dry veins and bottles still waiting  
on a table.

You choose a room in the hotel  
and hang the lamp on the wall.  
Your reflection wavers in the mirror.  
In the dim light your eyes are open mines.

I refuse dead ends, abandoned beds  
with mushrooms growing through the mattresses.  
While you sleep I walk the hallways  
nailing horseshoes to the walls,  
trying on dresses threaded with cobwebs  
and the scent of mothballs and lavender.

A shaft finally opens.  
I clear away the porous earth  
and piles of timber.  
Between here and town  
bodies huddle in a tunnel,  
glowing and heavy as gold.  
It takes all night to carry them out  
and they turn to dust  
at the first touch of air.

When I return to you, phosphorescent  
from their hands,  
you will remember the dark place  
where I have held you,  
the trails of light I have left on your skin.

## I Never Told You

I never told you how easy it was.  
You blew the horn on the toy car  
while I petted the guinea pig.  
The pile of ice skates dripped  
in the corner. There was a picture  
on the wall of a big bird, white  
and heavy-looking, standing out  
from the canvas on a stairstep  
of folded paper. It trembled  
when we stamped our feet.  
I'm sure I did say at least once,  
"oh come on, we're not children,"  
but you couldn't hear me over  
the clanking pots and pans.  
I wanted to go back out on the ice.  
Down at the inlet I could see  
silver ripples of moving water.

Near the island, bushes and reeds  
stuck through the frozen surface.  
Where I brushed off the snow  
I saw bubbles, deep cracks.  
Did you know I could hear you  
singing back at the house?  
I listened all the way through  
"Silent Night" in German. The pond  
was empty except for a group of boys  
at one end, chilling their beer  
in a hole. I skated around them  
in a big circle. I practiced stopping  
in little circles. Soon it was easy.  
I spun so that everything blurred.  
Then I skated over the snow-covered  
gravel and down the hill to the river.



**The Fox**

On top of the mountain, my mother  
saw a red fox. When we came around a bend  
it stood bright against the snow  
at the edge of a thicket. It watched her.  
She didn't tell my father. He carried me  
on his shoulders down the trail.  
Half-asleep, I opened my eyes  
in a patch of low fog. My face was wet.  
I didn't know where I was.

My mother and father fight  
about Catalina Island. He says  
she can't see it from the mainland.  
She says she can. It is cloudy.  
She told me we might go out  
in a glass-bottomed boat, but he won't  
take us. Along the shore, people  
in raincoats and yellow gloves  
gather razor clams.

The car breaks through the guardrail.  
One wheel hangs over the edge,  
over water. With my cheek against the seat  
I sit still. The man from the tollbooth  
runs toward us in his suit and cap.  
I pretend I'm in a seashell.  
It's midnight. Where are my black olives,  
my slices of cheese and ham?  
I saw my hair under the microscope.  
I saw water.  
I don't want the empty bank,  
or the string of pearls.  
I can walk from here.  
When is it safe to come out?  
When will the coins stop falling  
to the yellow carpet?

**Twist**

I drive fast on the old highway,  
pointing out shapes under the kudzu  
to the man beside me.

I'm taking him back to my house  
to sit on the long green sofa  
and play cards  
around the handpieced table.

I will reassemble the bed,  
put on the thick blue canopy  
to match the spread and drapes.

I will take the knife out  
from under the pillow  
and break the blade.

During the hot afternoons,  
I'll unlock the trunk  
and wear the faded lace dresses,  
the gold sandals.

This is not a dream.

That's my store on the corner  
with its shady cement wall,  
my sewer ditch blossoming  
with algae and violets.

Here we come in the car  
to see the envelope full of my hair,  
the loose banister.

Look, that's my mother and my aunt  
sitting on the stairs  
expecting a thunderstorm.

The lights are out.

They're sharing a bowl  
of pineapple sherbet,  
and when the lightning  
flashes over their faces

I can tell they are smiling.

**Paradise**

You have to watch out for the past.  
Where are we right now?  
Outside the Dixon General Store,  
Kevin and I eat fried fruit pies.  
Sundays, the Dixon bar is closed.  
Where are we now?  
Across the bridge, Paradise—Population 300.  
I am not thinking what paradise could mean  
except that the striped cliffs  
lead us in. The green river matches  
the green of the sky in the east.  
Hail. What is hail in Paradise?  
Ice, like anywhere else.  
Kevin says, "I could live here."  
Paradise has two bars, both open.  
If I were Kevin, this poem might be about irony.  
He would tell me, "You should have left  
that deer skull where you found it  
instead of taking it to Paradise  
in a paper bag on the seat between us."  
He might try to make me tell him  
why I wanted it. Of what were you made?  
Of dust. I could make up something good enough  
about the permanence of bone.  
Where are we right now?  
You know what I mean.  
"It would be worse to take it  
and then put it back," he said.  
This ending is too easy. Go back  
to Paradise. I almost forgot  
this was not Kevin's poem.  
Never mind the deer skull.  
He said we might reach escape velocity.  
We talked about what would happen.

III

**Red Berries**

I woke and said mama. I don't know  
if I was calling her. Overnight  
the berries turned from orange to red.  
"What does my back feel like?" he asks.  
All week the fish have swum circles  
in the old washtub. I release them  
at the reservoir. Overhead, skeet plates shatter.  
The shots send tremors through the water.  
The fish don't want to leave my hands.  
They are like moths.  
They want to fly in my hair.

My mother types, sucking a penny.  
I sit on the floor by her cot.  
Mama, I was the one who cracked  
all the lightbulbs. I pulled out the wire.  
It was after I fell in love.  
"No, my pearl," she says, "You can't escape politics."  
My mouth tastes like ink. This isn't the scene  
I wanted. A man stands by a rock wall.  
He is tired of walking.  
He takes off his pack.  
My mother shows me the black hairs on her breasts.

**Evensong**

The front room sometimes is a bar. He leaves the four men there, her voice already in his ears like wind, and closes the doors behind him. In the last room she is singing, her face turned to the ceiling. Her ivory dress clings as if it is wet, darkened by her skin. The song is half sob, a hum and stab in his marrow, a blue vibration like the center of a flame.

When she drops her head he asks her to sing again. She spits something shiny into his hand and closes his fingers around the edge. "My vocal cords are cut," she says. A red rope drops and she drapes it around her neck. Her whole body flickers but he never thinks ghost. She can't step down, so she must be safe, but the floor drops and he is falling.

He waits in the front room. The four men carry her body in and prop her beside the river that flows along the east wall. Then he is alone with her and the evensong of pigeons and the hollow smoky sound of the moon on water. He can't look at her. Down the river the men are frying fish, and he tells her softly, "yes, a fishbone could be a ladder." When she sits up and stretches out her arms he is not surprised. He doesn't think angel as she arcs into the river and the crab-apple branches close.

He can't save her, and can't keep her from coming back, the scent of burnt paper in her dress, her body washed on a flood plain miles away waiting for the four men, her mute music, the barnacled notes.

If I say love because I don't know  
another word, I will have to bring  
the moon in, and the black tailless cat.  
I will have to consider luck and chance  
and how after the game of poker  
and the argument about the actor  
everyone else went out into the snow  
and I stayed. I will have to say  
we stood by the heater and danced  
to some old song and he blew out the candles  
and we went to bed together.  
I will have to stay in this poem  
until morning when the radio still plays  
and a dog wearing a bell walks under  
the window, and the bed shakes  
from trains linking cars three blocks away.  
I would like to stop here.  
I will have to take us to the restaurant  
where we have toast and half-done eggs  
and read our horoscopes  
with the old men eating alone  
and the springs of the seats gone.

I would rather go to the afternoon  
we sat in Wendy's house waiting  
while she took a bath, playing  
the same song over and over. Then  
she would put on a flowered robe  
and make jasmine tea, and we would  
all stretch out on the floor  
and sleep until spring. We would  
grow older without knowing.  
I would not let us go beyond  
what we were doing, sleeping  
through the dripping ice and the sun.

**Revenge**

Last fall the gypsy painted her booth red.  
She laughed in the fairway dust,  
a deep green bruise on her shoulder,  
woodchips in the wind, the smell  
of manure and grease.  
“Hooks and eyes bring you luck,” she said,  
“Make him fasten them.”

The house behind the orchard burned.  
We ate peaches off the trees,  
their skin warm and smoky.  
He talked a lot, used words like “corn silk”  
and “oil lamp.” He said the tobacco  
drying in the field was rows  
of blond children looking back.

The gypsy said to dream of the fire eater  
means survival. Tonight I’m him.  
I do all the talking.  
Tonight he wants to listen.  
I talk about starlings on the phone lines.  
This is not a question  
of revenge. All I know about the place  
I tried to take him is neither of us belong there.

It’s snowing again. Going home  
the car gets stuck twice.  
I stand in the kitchen.  
The avocado seed on the sill  
is growing roots in a glass of water.  
He said inside my body was the safest place.  
At the end of the pasture, a girl  
puts her lips to the electric fence.



Sir, allow me to say  
the moon was full.  
I am sure you'd rather I didn't.  
Allow me to say the moon is full  
on every canvas stacked in his closet.  
Lean close, so the tip of your waxed mustache  
brushes my cheek.  
Your name is Buckshot.  
You are a tattoo artist.  
Pronghorn, not antelope, he said.  
He handed me a vial  
of litmus paper.  
When I woke in the dark  
he sat smoking.  
The dog's face glowed at the window.  
I thought I was a ghost.  
Yes, sir. A little melodrama.  
It's simple geometry—  
turn enough corners and you're back  
where you started.  
Little boys roast potatoes  
over fires in the gutter.  
But a pyramid, there's one thing  
I don't trust.  
Say: "I hate it when the girls cry.  
The outline hurts more than the rest."  
Who was it who wanted to be a priest?  
Hey, don't you remember  
how all this started?  
You went to get your first tattoo  
from a girl whose hair smelled like almonds.

## Pioneering

Justin said to wait and he'd be back.  
 I gave him my blue rock,  
 my bird.  
 Untangle those tin cans and string,  
 I said. I'm making ambrosia

in the hotel room. I leave milky prints  
 on the windows from the coconut.  
 The blue lights on the runway blink.  
 It helps to stay in one place

for a while, even though the man who lived in the old cabin  
 next to ours had a gun  
 and a yard full of crabgrass he wove into whips.  
 He watched Love Connection every weeknight at eleven.  
 Light from the TV flickered  
 through his curtains.

On weekends he watched us.  
 When I saw him sight us  
 through the scope of his gun  
 I waved. I kissed Justin's knee.

While I wait I ride the carnival swings  
 every day. I live in air, like a plant.  
 You don't need anything,

he says when I run out to meet him.  
 I sit crosslegged in the cab of his truck  
 and he drives out past all the lights.  
 The stars flash.  
 He tells me his new word—

noctilucent. I know we are headed for the ocean  
 to sit on a rock  
 and look for dolphins. I keep pointing

out the windows. There's a nice spot.  
 The flat-topped ridge looks almost like horizon.  
 I could grow ornamental cabbages  
 on the hillside.

Yes, I'm exaggerating. But I do  
have questions. What makes a washboard road?

Can we please stop here?

From the steps of the empty church  
I can see the slag heaps gleam.  
The mimosa branches droop,  
dropping their blossoms. The tree  
has been in bloom for weeks.  
It makes me sleepy. I lean against the stops  
and shut my eyes. I know it all without looking—  
the row of outhouses down the gully,  
the ceramic shards arranged in patterns  
on the ground. I hear the sound of hammering.  
Yesterday crossing the trestle,  
I scraped my ankle on a strip of rusted metal.  
I used the last of the antiseptic.  
The bleached bones of a dog  
lay on the track below, the black hide  
torn off the ribs and gnawed to shreds.  
When I got back to the church  
the chipped vase was full  
of black-eyed Susans.  
I open my eyes. Children are running  
down the hill, their arms open wide  
to the wind. Steps come around the side  
of the church but I don't turn.  
His hands touch my shoulders.  
"I've been to California," he says,  
"I met a man who built a house  
out of driftwood."

The Queen Anne's lace along the road is turning brown.  
I've forgotten all I gave up  
for the smell of lamp oil,  
long nights with a voice always calling for water.  
The river hangs like a curtain  
over the windows. Last month on the back steps  
we drank every night, woke angry,  
unable to remember why.  
Now I've dreamed of the red bird again,  
and the child I've left behind  
who might be mine.  
Wolves leap to the trees  
and lie along the branches.  
The rusted machines in the barn won't let us leave.  
Harnessed, his horse circles the press,  
crushes stalks of sugar cane to green juice.  
He carries full buckets to the iron pot  
over the fire. I fry venison, watch him  
fold his arms and stare at the sky,  
at the patch of soy beans near the porch.  
Wind rustles the weeds, the same sound  
the wolves' eyes make as they watch  
the child. He kills a copperhead,  
throws it to a ditch.  
The horse stops.  
Black clouds spread out above the barn.  
I call him in, unbuttoning my dress.  
He stirs the pot once more,  
covers it. Light ripples along the walls.  
Look, I say, and I show him my steady hands.

**Marina**

Down at the docks I'm still  
not sure. If I stay  
with him I will have to tear  
the tape off the last box,  
the one marked "miscellaneous"  
in red ink. The children  
pass by with bouquets  
of snapdragons. They squeeze  
the blooms to make them talk.  
Could I say I just came down  
to watch my reflection  
in the water, to buy  
some fresh fish for the old woman  
next door with granny beads  
of dirt and sweat  
around her neck?  
Once he said something to me  
about unlimited time,  
about new freckles  
on my chest.  
I almost missed it  
It was one of those nights  
he pressed his face  
to the glass of the kitchen door.  
I don't know  
if he wanted in or out.

The choice had more to do with waiting  
than I thought. I built a fire  
at the edge of the lot and burned  
my dress. Airplane lights  
washed over me. Gradually  
it became winter. I was driving.  
Along the road I saw signs—  
one said quarantine—  
but I ignored them. I burned  
my list of numbers in the ashtray.  
When he got in the car,  
it was warmer. He put a bottlecap  
under the broken wiper.  
The scraping stopped.  
He stopped coughing.  
The snow fell straight down.  
We listened. It was nearly dark.  
This was one option.  
I couldn't think of the other.

February 2nd

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I can't stop laughing. The funny thing  
happened hours ago. On TV a man  
in a suit carried a groundhog  
through the crowd.  
It sniffed his sleeve,  
curled around his arm.  
My mother wants my address.  
While I talk to her  
the sun glints off black dog hair  
on the sofa. He turns  
the Portuguese tape on loud.  
I've picked up a few words—  
lobster, please, thank you.  
Last night I bit a fragment of brass  
in the venison.  
I put it in my pocket.  
This morning we planted small red potatoes  
in two metal buckets.  
Their white roots glow  
through the soil.

Tonight while he is packing  
I check the mail.  
I read the catalog of glass eyes.  
Some are for dolls,  
others for taxidermy.