

Lake Michigan Boys

Winter never lifts suddenly
creeping temperatures tease

groaning fissures into the ice
and sometimes a stupid boy

wanders too far from shore
makes an island of himself

each mutely wishes it were him
incensed by indecision

drifting toward Wisconsin
on that breakaway floe

soon coastal girls will wriggle free
from winter coats then summer shifts

and gambol barely out of reach
of the cold and muttering surf

we were Spartan with AM
radio and cut-off jeans

prone with elbows and loins
pressed into the warming sand

we'd confront their shimmering skin
speak up or ache like a tooth

Parable

Uncle fell for a migrant girl –
stubborn as a volunteer rose –
then perished by the harvest moon.

Wading through the wait-a-bits
at the edge of a freshly turned field,
Grandma searched sad furrows of earth.

*There's no competing with Sorrow,
Child. Still unschooled in transience,
I asked if she meant to say, Love.*

*Don't become what happens to you.
When the springtime plow turns loose
a bone, remember why it's best*

*to keep a girl who knows how deep
to put the beast that winter killed.*

Hardwood Autumn

Abiding more when out of doors (or well into his drink),
Big Mike takes the better part of a day to harvest half
a dozen rows. His tractor stops near the yellow-leafed copse,

where at ten years-old they buried hickory nuts in loam –
he and that pretty neighbor who, at sixteen, married quick
some blue-eyed boy whose daddy owned a Chevy dealership.

Mike spies his Angie yanking boxers from the line, clothespins
tumbling to the grass. Tonight he'll face reprisal meatloaf,
without complaint – or salt. He'll share with her the phantom deer:

each fall, they graze the edge of harrowed fields, white tails like flags
as they bound away. Won't be a lie. *Should've seen 'em, Ang.*
Dove into them woods like swimmers plumbin' a bottomless pond.

Mood Indigo

Like a blue flame in a speakeasy, that's how Grandpa found her, shuddering and swaying to *Mood Indigo*. But family lore won't tell us what a hard-handed man could whisper to such a woman that would let her trade downtown celebrity for orchards and fields —

the glamour of tending endless rows. Seventy-two years later, her mind's returned to Chicago. Having met again the warmest man, she's slipped into that old blue dress, packed her valise. Through the screen, see her rocking the front porch swing, waiting to ride to where she already is.

Melody

Providence held her to orchard paths, dropped a match
in that house where nobody lived. Having stayed five years
a ghost, only a Unitarian choir would suffer her leaving.

Imagining gravel streams and asphalt rivers, she waded
into the depot for any passage her savings might afford.
A gust stole lyrics from my hand; the paper cartwheeled

across the yellow line, past a mandolin case — pretty at her feet.
No coquette, she looked away to smooth her fluttering
dress — robin-egg blue — just so, by God, we never met.