

Leather

Dad's Leather

The fish weren't biting  
in the trees  
or the water  
so we packed the minnows  
with the bologna  
and cheese sandwiches  
and walked

past a waddle of ducks  
grass  
swishing  
at water's edge

the pole in my right hand  
forgotten  
for the memory  
of my left hand  
lost in his.

## Snow People

I remember wearing  
socks on my hands in winter.  
Two pairs on each  
hand tucked up to the elbow  
in our coat sleeves.  
When those were wet we traded  
them for the dry  
ones on the chair by the woodstove  
and we built snow  
people everywhere.  
We gave them arms and eyes  
and smiles.  
We gave them grassy wigs  
and holey shirts so they looked like  
us.  
In the yard, under the willow  
was enough coal  
to make a hundred snowmen smile.  
But how sad they all looked  
those snowy people  
with their white, willowy  
arms dragging the ground,  
their round, hungry  
bodies never quite as perfect  
as we wanted them to be.

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5am at Wal-Mart

and third shift sits in their cars,  
exhausted. The last cigarette-break  
of the night escaping through cracked  
windows. Making my way inside, I pause.  
If I squint my eyes  
here, at the other end of it  
the parking lot becomes a sort of mini-city  
asleep, except for these tiny working smoke-stacks.

I think of Valleydale  
think of sitting in the upper parking  
lot as a child waiting to pick you up  
from work. Steam from the boilers  
rolling through the early morning street  
light. Think of that bird's-eye-view  
the long narrow path from livestock  
truck to slaughterhouse doors  
from fear to death.

Think of pigs and cattle  
pushing into each other, moving  
forward, the only direction they know.  
Think of the cries and squeals rising  
in finality from that deep place.

A car horn blares in the distance  
somewhere, someone's brakes  
are squeaking. Outside,  
the air, thick and warm  
as fever, forces me through the automatic  
doors.

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Living Room

*After Sharon Olds*

The women, sitting plush in the living room  
discuss the arrangement of seats  
around a large, mahogany table  
and the space needed, between each  
to accommodate overstuffed pockets.

While I sit, on the bare floor of my living room  
stuffing the electric bill  
to the back of my pocket  
in favor of tomorrow night's dinner.

The men, standing,  
in the false light of their own importance  
draw chalk-white lines  
on a field of green felt  
and keep score on Andrew Jackson's back.

While my husband, in light of his disability,  
draws a single black circle  
in an expanse of useless want ads  
and counts on valium  
to keep depression off his back.

And, from my place,  
just above the tiles  
in the foyer of their American Dream,  
I see their lips move  
as the sound dies  
on the black and white portable  
in the corner  
of the room  
I live in.