

*Bonnie Jacobson*

PENELOPE JOANNA

Once a year Joanna's husband leaves her.  
Packs his gear and sails north, in need of setting out  
and returning. His friends go too.  
Sometimes they see a bear, or dream they do.  
Once, on a wilderness island, they knelt  
for an hour and watched a snake eat a frog,  
its bleat last in. That night they asked themselves  
important questions, but drank too much  
to remember the answers. He guesses they  
spoke of the war, and women, stories Joanna  
does not want to hear, he informs her,  
and rolls over and turns off the light.  
Once, Joanna's husband was seized from  
his ship and rushed to an insolent port.  
There, he was stripped and shaved hairless  
as an Arab bride, he was painted yellow  
and cracked like an almond and entered.  
He woke a zero, a poor Pinocchio  
dangled from wires, a fetus, reborn at last  
but wheeled home, the child of his wife.  
*Yes you may, no you may not*, she chirped.  
One night while she slept, he slipped from  
her slipcovered rooms, he leapt her hedges  
and ran off to sea, thrusting north, ice on his beard—  
*Oh where has he gone*, his poor wife cried,  
*my little hibiscus, my delicate boy—*