

BASKET WITH BLUE OX

for Donna

Today it seems possible that myth alone could have made this place, or made it possible at least for us to be here, this small lake where once the great woodsman stepped, drunkenly, on his way home. Cross-legged on the dock we weave baskets of willow, mulberry root, small nests we dip again and again into the cool water. Only here could everything the past imagined for us seem true: how spring is a single season, that it somehow makes us tender. Or that the blue ox lies down each night on the far shore and wakes with a breath that blows off morning's fog. In their unsinkable boats our husbands fish close to that shore as we continue these baskets, fill them with stories. Our friend the loon listens to tale after tale; his frequent cry of belief detonates on the still air. The preposterous lies line up in our many baskets on the dock. We have made them and there is no limit to what they can hold. The lake is nothing less than the footprint of a man, these baskets the honor of hopeful hands, and men in boats must come back, ushering in the dark, carrying beautiful fishes.

JUST BE HOME BEFORE SUNDOWN

But I shrug off the red sweater
she's knit around me. It's not in me
to keep my shoulders always warm.
Or to get off the bus every time
at our same spot, as if other

squared-off corners were not so splendid.
Besides, I've seen what's going up
down the block: a village of workers
moving in behind a facade of little doors,
and on the block beyond that, a steel ball
sending the bricks of an old building
everywhere. Besides, I keep asking, *Which
sun do you mean?* She just answers
something about my father. What can he do
that takes all day? His shoulders
go out into light and bring back dusk
as far as the doorstep. I've seen his maps
crumpled on the car seat, his inked lines
wavering across the cornbelt, which he says
strangled the breath last year
out of all of us. Besides, I can't listen
any more to the supper music—violins
skipping their best notes in the scarred
grooves of slow-falling twilight
in the edges of the room I want only
to be out of, out amid the jazz
of crickets, my mouth filled
with the firm gristle of night,
the pop and fizz of traffic,
headlights and dark roads colliding.

HOUSE OF CLUES

After dinner there are board games
on the floor. Our hands push
the tin pipes, the knives
and crowbars, in one room and out
another. Although not a part
of the game, we reward ourselves
with money. How well we know
each other—faces, hands—the lucent