

Your Story · Susan Wood

We rose from the bed and sat at the table.
You were telling your story,
how your father would disappear for days
each morning with a tin pail full of cold meat
and thick bread to come home drunk
for a few hours' sleep and another bloodshot dawn.
Nights you lay so still
you scarcely breathed, wishing and wishing.
In family legend you had the Irish in you,
those high-horse looks at two, and charm,
the boy who's always "acting up."
You hid your young aunt's sandals in the icebox
while she was dressing for a date.
You laughed and wouldn't tell. She slapped your face.

Whole summers by the ocean escape you
and there's only the moment the cart is bolting,
leaving behind a blur of sand and sea,
the unfamiliar streets, the boardwalk. You were four
and proud to be minding your baby sister.
Your father had handed you two nickels
for the ride. On the far side of town
the driver stopped the pony,
made the children all get down, and drove on.
If your father had come just then to lead you home,
what would it matter? *All I remember is being lost*,
you said. And so do I. It's what we know
and can believe in, why the present wears the past,
each day knit to the next.
Or why this story is true as anything,

where the boy and girl are left in the forest.
I'd like to say it has a happy ending,
they find their way, love,
breadcrumbs the birds haven't eaten,
this table in the morning light.