

Known Survivors / Mary Parker

Shaking the hand of a known survivor
is like shaking hands with your lost fears,
like that compulsion to touch a certain doorknob
before your breath was stopped.

One of her butterflies,
Mother pinned you with her ethers;
her gas expanded in you
like blood growing under a scrape

or a new streetlight, bloomed
where you thought you'd stoned out a night-corner.
Mother, arranging her pins in the skirt folds
near her belly, as she scraped up your hair,
pressed her breasts into your face.

Now, lovers embarrass you,
though you used to see fox-fire in your breath
on winter mornings. Now, you draw my words like steam
to your mouth, cup, to your limbs bent up
trying to come back to me.

Moving from you, I remember
in a hayfield in Vermont,
I waited for a woman on a white bike,
in soft slippers pedalling toward me,
her ears tongues, licked in on themselves.
I asked her to stop;
she heard the taste, rode on.
Part of me rides with her in her eastern, sexual eye.

Balanced, coarse, she always knew that cold exposes roots,
wrote her name in frost on a car window,
spent an hour in a warm room ripping out her fingernail.

I give you her now, amorphous, warm,
flowing with bicycle rhythms.
Her hands are blue, and loose beneath the nail.