

II

Martha's story is not so simple (*yes*).
She is older and freer
Like her lover is gone (*yes*)
And she is poor (*yes*),
Poor Martha:
With her belly in her hands
With a man who is anything but Jesus.
Poor Martha:
With blood and misunderstanding
Tragedy is opening for all her roses.

Lord, legalize this:
Our bloom and decay.

Martha is something in common with rope
On fire.
Her womb should give her pleasure,
Not *hangers* and *quinine* and *soda*.

Jealousy / Harold Witt

The way I pictured jealousy was this:
an old vignette my mother often told—
she and Aunt Lillie, the young and older sister,
strolling one Sunday
in some Dakota field

with Uncle Peter, a handsome bridegroom then,
when a monstrous bull loomed toward them hooving and snorting—
lifting their several skirts the girls ran
careless of cowpies,
Uncle Peter escorting

both to the safety of an empty wagon
and helped my mother up and then his bride,
a flurry of flounces and her wide sash dragging—
which may have been the worst mistake
of his life—

in that mad second giving a hand to my mother
before he'd saved his palpitating wife—
she never forgot, or forgave one or the other,

and always felt that horn
twist in her side—

ghostly as the one that tore my brother
and gored and gored him since the age of five
when I was born, he imagined his darling mother
forsaking him
to bring me home alive.

Estates / Pamela Stewart

*They are rivals—the Northern Lights and
this white melon in its black cane-chair.*

—Emily Dickinson

I am noticing from my window how the grass
Must be startled by my sister lifting
Bundles of straw to spread over
The carrots and turnips. Now November,
And last evening it was Father
Who saw it first, down on the common. He
Ran across to sound the church bells.
Everyone coming out of their houses
From supper onto the lawns
Watched the sky. Purple
And bronze, unlike any jewels or cloth I know.
I saw it from this window, the way the trees
Were black and terrible within this radiance.

It's some time now that a man moved out
Beyond any approaches. Twice before, but
Distance is most severe for he does exist
Somewhere. Not like the blue, frozen faces
Brought up from the South. Those losses can
Be named and placed.
Perhaps beside a little sister wrapped
In white satin. And what
Is my service. Left to be here. I am not
What they think if they think at all. God,
Keep us from what they call households! We are the
Brittle sisters. A carriage at the door,
And whoever knocks belongs to someone