

My Great Grandmother goes to see *King Kong* at the Crescent Theatre, Neodesha

Like everyone else, she hides herself in stories.

On Wednesday afternoons, she shakes off
Artie and the boys like a dog shucking
water, takes the puttering truck to town

to have affairs at the movies. In the grainy
grey stare of the screen, she sits and sweats
through her starched print dress, unravels
the hole in the velvet cushion.

She is a different woman for all her men.
For dancing Fred, she becomes
a flickering canary, cage uncovered, her throat
small with song. For Clark she's a redbud tree,
a pink heart whispering in the wind.
Some weeks she flexes with spurs in her side
to the onward rhythm of the plains.

Only once she lets her heart break loose –
for him, big bestial him, beating
his big gorilla chest, a heartbeat

sounded on a drum. Him,
who lets her be her animal self,
smelling of sourdough
and old cotton – whose yearning
vibrates the skin of the world.
It takes all kinds to look for love.

Watch him now, still undefeated,
as he clammers up the tallest building
in America – the tallest in the world.

Look
at that reach, that burgeoning
metropolis, that height.

Portrait of a White Enamel Jug, 1874

It's late afternoon and the sun is the colour of biscuits.
It slides through the panes at a furtive angle,
a slender thief sidling into the house.
There's a cluster of vetch in the jug
at the back of the sink. It droops
like old women coughing, and already
it smells of dust and dying summers.
A field away, James and the horses
lag against the uphill pull. In just a few weeks,
the grasshoppers will bear down
like a rasping army from the north
and all the year's corn will be undone.
In the bottom of the frame,
the tiny hand of a child who will one day
pull my great grandmother from her body
reaches up to tug the purple blooms.

Thaw

All through the winter she lay beside me,
cool hands mapping my body, her breath
an owl's wing. During the long dark, we slept
curled and still as the Taiga, my heart a small mammal
dreaming, a fragile beat. Some nights as she broke
over me, I said, *You are a perfect snowflake.*
Some nights the sky was electric and she blazed.
Afterwards I held her delicately, loose as wood smoke.

She spoke with the soft hush of pine needles,
though already I cannot recall the words. Already
she was drifting. Through the dark, I could see
the cold mirror of the morning, when I would wake
to emptiness, a crumple of sheets, the snow
sinking back into the mountainside as water.

Peggy Wood

We go in the plumb-deep wells of winter nights
edged like a paring knife, chicken-poxed with stars.
We follow the sheep-trods, me
tramping in my purple wellies, the sister
I never had
wraithed behind me like a cloud,

until we come to Peggy Wood.
Here, a woman in her nightdress
hooked herself
to a high branch, or so the big boys say, right
at the centre
where the sky locks shut and the trees
extend like marionettes.

There's an unlit fire in the brushwood,
a stubble of fag butts in the soil.
I come for the sucked-in
breath of the dark. I come
because it is the only place to come for miles
where I can let my words
sound out like a crunched leaf,

because my sister is a tight band
around my chest, because her arms
are a bulldog clip.
I come because actions
mean something at night.

Sometimes we shelter
in the small of a tree, count seconds
between a thundering train and the lightning
swerve of an owl.
Sometimes we watch for Peggy's ghost.

My sister squeezes till I can't
draw breath, says, *Look –*
see how tight a person can hold?
and she settles in me like fermenting leaves. Here,
where the trees eat themselves
and the air has a tomcat screech, she says,
It's dangerous to be a girl alone at night.
And I hook
myself to the dark

and say, *I am not*
alone, I am
never alone, why won't
you leave me
alone?