

OLD WIVES THE TALES COME FROM

Crocheting string doilies, dresser scarves, antimacassars  
no one wants, filling boxes, filling huge cotton prints,  
sleeves sloping like tents, hooks unfastened  
back of the neck, they string out  
death in rocking chairs.

Daily they fatten to fill their final boxes, paying  
out advice no one needs, paying  
out the slow twine, enlarging the old designs,  
straining fifty odd years of wifery  
for a mite to impress the young ones  
tightening against their webs and cardboard,  
closing in with the last lid.

Frayed sheaths  
used awhile by knife-voiced kin  
who own everything in focus  
outside the net of squares and wheels.

On humid suburban evenings, on some deserted  
concrete patio, they group like toadstools,  
picking at the threads of the days' patterns,  
unraveling their mouths,  
honing their only weapons.



## BEFORE A POET KNOWS WHAT SHE IS

Eyes wild and light as a puma's,  
breast-buds flowered plump, up-tilted to summer,  
opal and nectarine heraldry of Erato in jeans.

Graduation brought three marriage pleas,  
Bottled forest smells, soft wool and leather  
always close, mouths and arms she liked,  
new sums to sift  
at the deep waking.

The suitors spoke hoarsely of apartments and TV—  
beds money children  
and two promised a car of her own.  
She ran alone to wrap night around her.

Without secret pages,  
too unsure to say how warlock winds  
hurried her blood, how river tongues rhymed  
with hers and promised more. Too new to tell  
how strings and reeds in minor keys were philters  
leaning her on shoulders of granite  
where tweed bark, pine breath, wilderness sinew  
and things without metaphor  
held her closer.

And her unnamed babies already lay in an outgrown box  
pressing blue gentians from ditches.

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