

THE FRANCINE RINGOLD AWARDS

*Poetry Prize*



WINNER

SOPHIA STID

*More Love*

Apricots. Furred whisper-tips of squirrel tails, edged black,  
as though dipped in paint. Moonrise: not the muscular arc,

but the slow softening of night, the dimming stars.  
Milk in the saucer, cold. Delicacy: what we lost in the war.

Pressing the heels of her hands into the gasp of the risen bread.  
Keeping her back to us, always, she moves furiously at the heavy sink.

The way she ties her apron could cut her in two.

We don't have to talk about the hunger for fruit—  
rooted down with hunger for cock, for cunt,

hunger to eat life, to take more life in. To have it, whatever it was. 1942.  
She did anything to live. Hated herself because she could not stop living.

Do you remember the nursery, when the lion spoke to us over folded paws?  
He said, *When we ask for an easier life, dear ones, we are not asking for more love*

*but for less.* How loved she felt in Paris then.

Hungry. No fruit. No furred tailed things.  
Moon blessing blind, burned city with milk. She was mortal and alive.

Raped by flashlight. Snow beneath gray with war. The lion walked beside her  
out of that alley we don't talk about, scorched with love, mane burning, eyes.

*If You Are Tough Enough,  
Let the Thing You Love Rot*

When the body is ritual,  
our tasks reincarnate. What can be washed,

warmed, used. Emptied. What needs taking  
out. The needs that leave us alone

with ourselves, holy as soap. Let rust pepper  
the mirror. A body is not a map. A body

is not a reason. When the body is ritual, ritual  
is barometer. A little more. A little less. A body

is not always loved. A body is not  
always—

so the old dissatisfaction comes back, when  
the body forgets. When ritual, constant return,

same shattered place. Across Route 129,  
in a field, a broken boat sits and rots on metal legs

and it's love. That means, a body is not an aesthetic.  
A body is made to be used. That means, a body

is made to be hungry. At the fish market,  
a small boy whines, *I never asked to be born,*

gets slapped. A body is a slow wreck  
that time remembers and takes back.

## *Rust Wilderness*

1.

The living beech. And hanging from it, the old swing  
made from rubber Grandfather found in the red ferns.  
A twisted tire spoke to him and became a horse's head.

So he hammered in two brass tacks for eyes,  
cut out ears — made us a horse —

when we were young, the farm was dying. No horses left,  
and I thought *the economy* was a disease. We were in retreat:  
acres sold at Christmastime, before tax season. Great-Aunt Eliza  
got her right leg amputated just above the knee. And I saw it —

my grandmother helping her out of the bathtub. Her thigh  
ended in an open mouth. Her long rubbery breasts tigered  
by silverfish stretch marks.

That body could only come from that town. Medieval,  
cutting off a limb. And Michigan, their Michigan, a different country —

one-note cicada song, cellars of jars, heavy wet air holding  
lungs down like a thumb —

2.

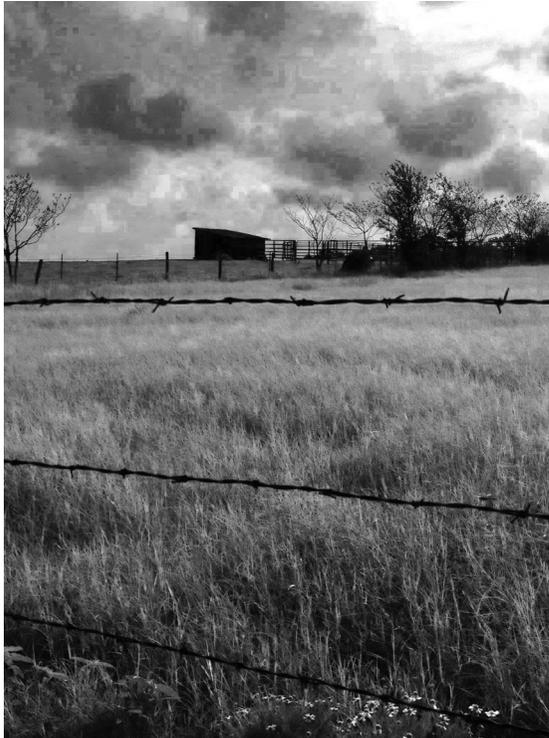
Lit cigarette tips stare back out of the dark. *Like jaguars*. Spooking myself, I  
wander inside. My grandmother sits at the kitchen table, injecting insulin.  
Eliza knits next to her, Fate of hard warning: her right foot went blue and  
killed its own calf. My grandfather carries his hard, round belly far in front.  
Sometimes, as I watched, he would place a hand on Grandmother's shoulder.  
She would keep saying what she had been saying, but in a quieter voice, the  
voice the animal doctor used with the blind horse: *Sbb, sbb, sugar. Sbbb-sbb.*

3.

My grandfather wouldn't sell but never talked about  
the part of the farm where Davy died. I didn't know  
where it was but I thought about it in the blueberry field,  
by Coon Lake, between the sunflowers —

until Grandma took me through the cornfields to the oldest barn. Inside, cobwebs, cool brief darkness. We walked through to the land out back, the packed hard earth. *Here*, she said, and I looked there and felt my ears fill with sound from nowhere.

Her face, fierce, fond. A mother, still. *Here, look.*  
I never thought about Davy, really, only his death. Standing there, where it happened, that felt as hard a sin as anything. For her, he had barely died. For me, that was all he had done.



Christopher Woods, *Barbed Wire, Brenham*, photograph