

GRETCHEN STENGEL

Nowhere but where

On our borders her thumbs whirl round and
round in a lap as wide as a wraparound porch

Hunker down in it

I can feel you, Grandma, jerry-rig a past from the flowers on your dress

Do rag rugs constitute a region?

Knick-knacks?

Are photos of the dead a dialect?

I rest my head on your continental shelf

You say, *My land!*

Not a daughter but a boarder

you cobbled together a country out of nothing at all

Then you had to live in it

Thumbs like paddywhacks propel us back

No place like place

Sour flower dresses are stiff at the neck
head is dirt-encrusted
body a field of clover mustard vetch
with concealments

This field smells of the manure pile
as it moves in the breeze of her chuffings

I love the way she deteriorates
the way her furniture migrates
from room to room
across time

Her undergarments and enema bag snake
in the shower stall in the back hall
beyond the kitchen door

We send her to the brain salon
to have her neurons rearranged

Angora shawls fold and stack

on the high-backed

rush-bottomed chair

In rooms strung out behind the kitchen door
where the laundry chute disgorges—

where milkman produce man trash tin can man
deliver and remove

where incinerators smudge and stop
 heaters flare up snuff out

Way back in there lives a minotaur:
captive
orphaned
beast of burdens

Crowd roars as she rummages in her drawer

The family
 intact
 upstairs

 distances itself from her machinations