

CHERA HAMMONS

Bail

At least he had a new reason for not coming home.
The fender of the Firebird curled darkly
in the grass beside the highway several miles from the house,
catching each pair of headlights that went by
and devouring them within its curve.
As I passed I tried not to look at it,
deep green relic of the second car totaled in as many months,
obscene and surprising as the proof of some old ritual.
The neck of the broken brandy bottle would have gaped near it,
the spirits discovered, they told me over the phone, against all odds
because of the glint it made thrown from the window
as the Firebird was rolling. Then they gave me directions
and told me to leave right away. It was urgent.
So I drove thirty miles in the clothes I had worn twenty hours
and didn't bother to fix my makeup.
When I arrived the sun had frozen in the haze
over the mountains and stopped getting brighter early,
trapped in icy gray and weak pastel that paled the mesas
that ended right before Nine Mile Hill. I went in just to be told
to get back in my car and wait. It wouldn't be long.
As the morning unstopped, the gray cinderblock building
reached to the parking lot, where I was the only one waiting.
I turned off the engine to save the regular unleaded
we couldn't afford to waste, and grew too cold to shiver.
They told me he had to detox. That it took four hours
to get him sober, while I wondered about lawyering up.
He came out as if he had stepped out of the bathroom
at a restaurant and was looking around for his place,
studying the sweat-brown brim of his cowboy hat
and scuffing the burgundy boots he called "ostrich titty."
He opened the door, saying not to say a word, not to ever
say a word. Did I understand? There was nothing to talk about.
This was my first marriage, one I'd agreed to,
and I knew too much now to want to know more.
Not about any of the things he'd done,
how we'd pay the rent, what he told his mother in Oklahoma,
where he believed his prayers, if he did pray, went,
or whose miracle it was, his or mine,
that he was so good at walking away from every wreck.