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## Bill of Sale (Lenoir Museum)

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# BILL OF SALE (LENOIR MUSEUM)

*Patricia Clark*

I've known this all along,  
or so I keep insisting  
to quiet the troubling thoughts  
that won't be still.

A piece of paper  
dated 1862 in a nearby county  
records that for twenty-five hundred dollars  
a young woman named Liza  
was sold as a slave.

A minute ago we were outside laughing  
in the Tennessee sunlight,  
planning a picnic  
beside the Clinch River where grass  
lures people to lie down and drift.

Now a shadow, the darkness of history  
uncomfortably close at hand.

I feel stupid and thick  
in my body, unable to believe anything  
until I see it with my eyes.

And I see the farmhands and the owners,  
red dirt stuck to their boots, and their faces—  
not grotesque, but ordinary—  
and the wagons waiting, horses chewing,

and a black woman, her face hidden,  
a breeze kicking up dust  
around her bare feet.