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Early Marriage: Burlington, Iowa, 1881

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EARLY MARRIAGE: BURLINGTON, IOWA, 1881

We swam in the stream and collected
Tadpoles. They squirmed in our hands
As we ran to the bucket:
Little handfuls of quick-change,
We were half-naked and the sun browned our skin.
Last year you found
A red ear at the corn-husking bee:
And I'm the one you chose to kiss.
Today, after
I'd brought your lunch to the orchard,
I had time to walk the path by the stream.

At times your hands seem
So big, like wounded bobolinks
They flap their tenderness.
I am afraid
O touching your skin, leg to leg,
Under the quilt at night. But then wish
You'd come down the cowpath,
Touch the hair on the back of my neck, run
Your finger on the inside of my arm
And know, as I know, how soft it is.

Last night I dreamed of a field,
A flock of birds swarmed
Over my breasts. Their soft bodies
Warmed my skin as they rose, scared and sure.

At breakfast we talk
Of the school teacher in Prairie Grove,
Found with her lover.
Tired of primers and cold mornings perhaps,
She was surprised by Mrs. Pollock, sent to find her:
"They rose like thrushes in the prairie grass,
startled and so alive."

Husband,
We choose what few things we can,
The rest we're given
By the haze and vista of this farm.