

1992

In Irkutsk

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In Irkutsk,

our train pulling us through,
a woman bowed low
to the platform and held to her back
bundles of branches and sticks
pulling them close
like a blanket held against
the cold of the early morning.
At home, we would gather bundles
of twigs, setting them ablaze
inside a small ring of stones
in the backyard, and huddle close
pushing our hands near the center,
next to the flame, while flakes of ash
rose between us then carefully
descended like a snow
falling against her cheek.

Outside,

the stars, now full of dawn,
mixed and fell with new
flakes and the black smoke
of our train, settling like
dust across the station, filled
the air between us with thick
greasy light. As our car rolled
past I could see the lines of her
face, twisted and rough like the
branches she carried, set around
her blue eyes, which, lit softly by
some unseen hand against the cold,
made their way home
to a backyard and a circle of stones.

- Trey Dunham '94