

Snow White

The cousins pick the berries,
avoiding the sharp canes,
brushing out the small ants from the middle
before popping them into their mouths.
I smash the ripe ones to my mouth,
squeeze my lips tight,
pretend that it's lipstick
and I'm Snow White.

She got her name bleeding in the snow.
Or was that her mother?
I don't want to bleed down that way.
So I save the garter snakes,
tossing them over fences so my father won't find them.
So my grandmother won't scream
when he crushes their backbones,
heads caught between pitchfork rungs.
Yet I'm always afraid one will open its mouth
and I will see cotton before the fangs.

The cousins talk of them down in the swamp,
past Suicide Hill,
in the undergrowth where we hide—
running from home without suitcases,
finding our way back late.

Someone wants to bleed me down though:
the boy with the jukebox who gives me chocolates,
or the one two doors down who blocks my path with his knife.

I will refuse all boys.
Avoid the fate of the neighbors' wives,
not allowed to drive cars,

who peek out from windows
while watching Art Linkletter.

I will avoid consequence —
the pricked finger that kills,
the aging apple.

I smear my mouth with the raspberries,
redder than blood,
play with the earthworms,
rescue the snakes.

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