

PATTIANN ROGERS

The Match

The leg of one is hooked around
and forcing the knee of the other,
who is flipped, knocked suddenly
to the ground, a roll and thrust
to upright, quick turn, the full nelson,
hands pressing hard behind the neck.

Both struggle, sweaty, grimacing
and cursing. They spit with the effort,
snort and groan from their bellies
like hogs, red-faced, stamping. Dust
rises from the old boards. One heaves
and lifts the other on her back, off
her feet, breaks the hold, flips face
to face. Clinging body to body,
they fight to choke each other at the ribs,
encircling arms squeezing tight.

The rickety nightstand rocks.
The lamp darkens, sways, tumbles,
snaps the connection. The foot
of one fights the ankle of the other,
maneuvering for position. Bare
soles and heels squeak on the waxed
wood. They fall to the floor, dragging
each other down. Nightgowns tangle
and rip, showing frayed cotton knickers.
A sleeve tears, a bodice slips as they claw

and scramble, one on top straddling,
then beneath, pressed and held to the floor.

The clock goes black. Atomic structure
falters. Teeth are deep in a shoulder.
A furious cry. There's an odor here
of salt, of ozone, of chlorine, a sound
like ocean blowing and hissing, thudding
against the shore, energy of the ruthless,
power of the unrelenting.

The steam, the streaking mucous and slick
rancid reekings of each perspiring body
are assumed by the other, the harsh
gut-breath. Were they to cease, to part,
were they to surrender or subdue, neither
would have a name, no spine of hell,
no hard grasp of heaven.

Out the door, bursting hinge
and lock, into the rain and storm —
a lightning bolt shows blue fire
on a boulder — they lurch down
the hillside pummeling each other,
over the rocks and assailing thorns,
through mud and riverlets, a melee
of knuckle and nail, scrambling
and flailing, latched together
forever — like moon and engine,
like fire and bell, like wren
and silence — for their own sakes.