

NORMAN DUBIE

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*"The Sparrow"*

The little Blaisdale girl was knock-kneed  
and cranky with freckles. She was  
quiet and often immersed  
in the King's versions of holy writ.  
They called her, Sparrow,  
so the Lord would be watchful of her . . .

When her father's boat failed  
to come back from the North Atlantic  
there was finally a memorial  
followed by a feast—  
she and I were charged  
to take blue enamel kettles  
full of garbage  
out to the pit beyond the henhouses.

She was a year older than me and could  
walk faster. I stumbled  
twice in the pigs'-run. It was  
a cold peninsula in Maine.

It was snowing heavily . . .

In her old communion dress she was  
now invisible in a white wind— the gulls  
arriving were quickly lost  
also in the storm:  
there was a disembodied sobbing, only the red  
carapace of lobsters, the screams of gulls

and then again,  
only the armor of those big sea spiders  
climbing high to a vanishing point  
beyond even Butler's Cove  
and the great granite face  
of Morse Mountain which like a freighter  
from Asia moved impossibly into the Nor'easter . . .

Asia was where her mother said the father  
had died first,  
eating even the bones of snakes, the sound  
of gnashing teeth  
there beside the compost heap, again and again,  
with full ardor  
and in the full circle of cold and nitrogen.