

rob COOK

*Cotillion*

She put on weight to bring in the flowers blue and dumb in their lamb skin. *Listen*, Dad hissed, *Will they be Mexican by tomorrow afternoon? All our beauty rituals fail.* Daughter remained on the couch, vivid and remarkable, a bag packed with her earlier skins. On television a spliced and edited girl was skipping rope on the roof of the Hollywood Mission. Dropping her net down to the lower quadrants daughter found a boat under the morning coats; she saw in the tiny skiff that nobody had ever died: the grammar school ballplayer shot in front of her house, Mrs. Babcock, Noah, Hannibal's army, they simply moved on until winter hit, then stopped and built their cities.

Daughter found intuition with vegetable salts, magnolia blossoms, the phone's terraces, a whole explanatory industry. She asked Dad quickly: *Is that cancer?* Both were attending an outdoor cotillion—everyone wore old money, their eyes were like rooms buried under the plantation ruins. The midwives and the help were out back moaning in the feed bags, though a few lucky ones had gotten away on the last tractor out. *I've heard tell of women piloting weather shots of the Carolina coast for a million a month*, Mr. Vandersteer bellowed from his sheep-fleece patio. Dad kept cool watching children pass into mergers and fears. Slaughter shows migrated north, katydids nursing in the long beaches of their shadow.

The cotillion lasted a week before the tundras came. The guests continued gossiping between sips of apple wine. Daughter panicked: *Father where are you? It's dark and the sun will take days to get here.* Up north the moon was drowning under the New England Harbor. Common thieves remained in their rabbit hutch, gaudy and Victorian. Dad was nowhere: his parakeet plotted tripwires across the chasms of his bedclothes on Gunyon Avenue that morning.