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A-Berrying in Newfoundland

You were just thirteen then, Lamb,
six years ago, August.
Oh my, no. I haven't thought of that
old story. You want that one?

Yes, I remember your face that night.
Window to window to window, you
alone, darting, the lamp-glow behind you
flashing like Flower's Cove lighthouse
showing the path home. You shouted,
In the name of God, who are you?

Yes, I'm sure I frightened you.
Bent over double coming in the door.
I always wore my hair up in a lovely ball,
not a wisp astray.
But that night, it was all over my face,
cut by cane break.
How could you have known me?

Something happened to me, I told you
I don't know what happened to me, I told you
I stayed in bed two weeks.

Yes, with Brigit Nolan, across the meadow.
Never alone, no. Never alone.

She said I strayed from her.
She went to empty her box in our bucket
and couldn't find me.
Walked the whole woods over.
Didn't pick a single berry.

Her husband moved them away, Lamb, do you know?
Three years since.

Yes, I'll try, but I don't remember
everything. Such a bright morning.
We went into the berry woods, in by Wells Cove.

No, I've never taken you there.
But oh, such berries,
just calling for cream.
So sweet on my fingers, my tongue.

Then the fog came down.

Hours and hours later I woke.
Near dark it was.
One of my boots, gone.
The berries, gone.
And my sweater, my clothes, or some of them.
And my face,
blood there, everywhere.
They had come upon me sure. Took me.
Astray.

You remember that word, do you?
I remember your silence.
Your eyes searching my torn pocket.
Your hand on my forehead, the cool cloth.

Yes, I'm sure that's what I would have said.
Astray. You know, in the fairies.
Astray all day.

Yes, of course it was them.
They laid me down by a brook.
Well, they won't cross water, will they?
You remember your grandmother telling you that?
And her mother? Yes, you do, of course.

What's this then?

Oh

And who would be listening to this old story?

Oh

Well, if it's for school, but

be sure you tell them it was the fairies, for certain.

Oh, no. It's not good to talk much about them,

how tall they were, their hair, their clothes

or even speak their name.

Good People, I should say.

The Good People. So anyway—

They set me down in Broom Cove, by the Perlican.

Seven miles I walked, all the way home.

A scarf on my foot. It's a blessing

your father didn't find me.

No one knew.

Well, except Captain Perry.

Yes, that's the one. From Carbonear.

Buys your father's fish right here in the cove.

I waved to him, Stop the car!

Raised my ripped hand high.

He saw me standing but only paused.

Who are you? he said.

Why Captain, says I straight away,

John Woodruff's wife.

Many's the time I cooked supper for you.

Don't you know me?

Note

The roots of this poem lie in a favorite tale of mine, a woman's story about her mother's personal experience, collected and published by folklorist Barbara Rieti in *Strange Terrain: The Fairy World in Newfoundland* (St. John's: Institute of Social and Economic Research, 1991, pp. 110–2). Rieti and/or I have changed all names for privacy. My additional changes enable me to present a more clearly coded tale: how could a woman in a small town name her rapist if her family depended on him for their living? How could she tell her tale to her young daughter so that one day the girl might fully understand?