

## FALLOW

She eased herself into the bed beside him,  
His farmer's heavy sleep  
Was lighter now with dawning near.  
At the creak of springs he stirred  
And turned to reach her hand, holding it,  
Carefully as his calloused fingers would allow.

Have you been up to make the fire, Jennie?  
She caught her breath and held her answer,  
But in a moment said,  
I rose to find the crop you planted failed  
Like the others — this field lies fallow still.

He took his turn at delay  
And reached to pull her in before reply.  
Perhaps I planted too shallow  
Or in the wrong time of moon  
Or worse, the seed was old and weak —  
You haven't yourself to blame for that.  
A man can't really know the cause in this.  
I've wondered at it though,  
If it came from a boyhood fever —  
The men at the blacksmith shop  
Would call it shooting blanks  
Or some such thing,  
And laugh and say that  
If a man's father had no sons,  
It's likely he won't either.  
I've never thought it could be you —  
Not with your sister's brood,  
And your twin brother's wife  
Is walking heavy now.

Stop, she said, Can't you see.  
A freemartin heifer never calves.  
Some places, you know, you could  
Send me back like faulty goods,  
And well you should.  
I've seen you envy other men their sons.  
And I know about that shiny  
Pony saddle in the barn.  
If you had another woman —  
A Hagar to dam an heir, he said.  
And watch you go to quiltings  
So you can tend the children there  
And have to listen to  
The smug complaints of overbearing wives,  
And then return to your  
Own quiet house to weep.  
No, I'll not have that.  
We need not wait for spring,  
And if the field does not reject  
The plow, we'll plant again.  
The field does not reject the plow  
Till gulls no longer follow in the furrow,  
But with this latest loss  
The plowing seems a ritual now  
Of some forgotten faith  
Or a prayer to a departed god.  
But it comforts those that live,  
When all the meaning's gone.