

Getting there

Millie Tullis

my husband questions the good historical centers like this do.
Kids come every year on a field trip and leave thinking
history sucks because they don't want to touch a cow's hot udder.

He did not want to touch the cow's udder and is remembering
how the man dressed as a pioneer called them city slickers
when they lived ten minutes down the road.

I loved these field trips and saved babysitting money to return
in the summer. I made candles by running in a circle.
Imagined I was Laura Ingalls Wilder. Churned butter in a skirt.

The historical farm was his great great grandfather's.
He says it's not like this is that farm. Half the valley
was somebody's farm a hundred years ago. When I was a kid here
we kept our eyes peeled for the adults working behind the scenes
who wore blue jeans and t-shirts like us. There are rules
about what clothing volunteers wear on the farm.

My husband did not know his great great grandfather had three wives
but he isn't surprised. The first dead.
The next two in polygamy.

The second and third were sisters. They share one headstone nearby.
The sisters and the husband. The oldest sister who is the second wife
buried
between her husband and sister.

They were both nineteen the years he married them.
I can't stop digging up my dead men for judgment.
My great grandfather who had an affair

with his secretary after his round-faced wife gave birth
to nine-pound twins and lived. My mother remembers the skin
on this grandmother's stomach hung over her aproned waist

like a long pancake. My third great grandfather
married his stepdaughter. My second great grandfather also
married his stepdaughter after raising her from the age of eight.

Tonight we do not enter the visitors center where the photograph
of my husband's great great grandfather hangs.

We are walking to the open grass before

the too-clean-to-be-accurate mercantile storefront selling honey and
rock candy

sticks to listen to the state-sponsored symphony perform
in the 125th year of Utah statehood.

We open our camping chairs above the earth
my husband's great great grandmother walked.
The younger sister of her husband's second wife

she married him in Mexico
three months before Wilford Woodruff's revelation
renounced the practice of polygamy publicly

clearing the way for statehood.

Tonight the smoke from California's fires reddens the setting sun
until the only lights left on are the stars

the stringed bulbs of the mercantile store
and the half domes of light letting the players see
the song they have already began to play.