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Back Cover: Fourth

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Fourth

It is dropped, this hint of conversation,
like a plate, clattering noisy
circumlocution until still.

And longer yet the resonant
rhythm echoes in my mind.

We are drying the dinner wineglasses
after a meal of succulent salmon dill
and topics all gristle and bone.

And I can't seem to get my teeth into
this sinking feeling of something
elusive in what you are not saying
as you chatter and wipe and
invert the goblets on their heads.
Was it the pommard or the tension —
taut as guitar strings over frets —
that caused rivulets of conversation
to trickle off into silence
like polished stones?

I am holding the washed-warm
serving platter against my aproned belly,
massaging its dry spine with a dishtowel.
I realize only after the cutlery
is neatly slotted in its groove, the candles
snuffed,
ovenlight snapped off,
that ever since you hinted at the impossibility
of a fourth,
I've been cradling the dish like a child.

— *Kate Marshall Flaherty*

