

The Last Conversation

I admit it, Grandmother, you were right.

I screened your calls. I was home

The whole time as the tape rolled on,

Recording beat by beat your accusations.

I know you're home.

Why haven't you called?

Your words backed me into a corner,

Held up a mirror to the gap growing in my heart.

I could never say I didn't love you,

But too much of the time

I didn't like you.

Trinkets disappeared from my room when you visited,

My grandfather became a louse and bastard in all your stories,

Omitted entirely in your interview with the press.

Your words so jagged they tore flesh from bone.

And Father,

Never able to uncoil from the fetal position.

And I,
Still waiting for a childhood to unfold.
Only now,
While the ground keeps you,
Can I say these things.

Tiny pink metal roses on your coffin—
Who would have thought you could make me laugh again.
Aunt Lanette said you picked it out yourself.

Stories flowed out of everyone:
Bullet hole in a your Sunday hat,
The relic of a reckless cousin.
Snakes pursued with sticks,
In Texas' rugged outback.
And the stubbornness
To outlive three husbands.

Did you really think I had forgotten you?
I only fought to keep the memories I wanted.

Underground you're just the person I imagined.
Your white paper hands no longer have claws.

In death you are a chuck wagon cook, a pink lady and a wife.

Mother says you can come visit again.

I won't lock away my treasures from your hungry eyes.

I'll put your number on speed dial,

And we'll talk about my grandfather in civil tones,

Call up the radio station and re-record the past.

Your pillbox holds my wedding ring.

Your embroidered jacket hangs in my closet—

I won't wash it.

Your smell is the only thing real I'll allow.

The picture hanging on the refrigerator shows us laughing.

I won't look close enough to see I'm crying.

Your selfless slumber has reopened the phone lines.