

Folks blame Melanie Engall for what happened – people being how they are –
whispering how she sauntered with the devil that night, her Baptist-daughter veins
hot with strychnine, her delicate hands white as magnolias,
and how easily she could snuff out a man's life.

But I know better.

The bruises on her back were the size of crabapples.

I know that June-bug night the moon hung from such a cold and high cord
it was brushed by the feet of angels
was so round it might have been punched from paper
its light like day

Gilding the tracks and the Burlington Northern clack-clacking
through Baton Rouge and the bats skittering over shuddering box-cars,
careening and banking like whiskey-drunk birds in the crocus night.

The smell of four pints of blood and how easily a knife slips into a man
staining the floorboards next to the flour bin.

Her bashful hands remembering the tiny little motions of the day.

The handle now so slick.

She left her window open for the moths to fly in, a glimpse of the slatted cattle-cars
that would deliver her from this place.

Oh, she said, how we rock in our cradles

How we spin in our broken orbits

I know when she ran through the stockyard, her nightdress trailing after her
like smoke, the conductor choked on his chaw, spit,
swore to god she was a ghost and crossed himself.

Lord forgive us sinners, she said.

We know not what we do.

How loud a boxcar is rattling through the night,
she thought of what Canada would be like
and the Allegory of the Cave
as moonlight was thrown through the cracks,
and scattered, skittered over her bare legs.