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## Poems

Honor Moore

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## Poems

### **Abstract**

THE LAKE, GIRL WITH A FUR-TRIMMED DRESS

# Honor Moore

## THE LAKE

Pale water, mountains almost black, clouds  
lifting from the lake – an old dock creaks  
at loose moorings, and from the summit, mountains  
until the horizon goes blind. What thousand  
do you count, walking a narrow bridge  
or bending as your canoe glides under it?  
This is a language we have written from  
always, though it bears its own fate – color  
of fern in shade, such a green it must tell  
the truth; a thatch of grass points to  
then obscures underground water; another  
tree dead across the path. Compare a sentence  
broken as you talk at a table, a gun  
in the pocket of a child, the survivor  
alone at her desk. She did not teach this –  
high heels, gray suit cinched at her waist, red  
lipstick, evident jaw. Tell me, how is it  
she comes back now? Nor did she teach this –  
to hear only one's own voice in the quiet;  
or to think alone, out into the dark  
pardon of the night. She had no husband,  
her hair curled garishly. I can't get back  
her voice, just her mouth gesticulating,  
and blond Peter who killed himself in London  
after we grew up. In the darkness, silent  
numbers etch themselves in red. I remember  
the pale disk traversed by hands, figures  
marking place along a circumference  
that lay in wait once, like the future.  
In the city night, a door closes –  
refrigerator, car, you can't tell which.  
What does it mean, she asked us, to be good?  
I ask to understand the impulse toward  
murder. I ask to be loved. And quiet,  
my head between those wide hands, a river  
spreads north in autumn light, pale as a lake.  
I've seen the beginning of that river,  
narrow as a brook, nothing built at its edge.  
At the end of the path, a woman turns  
to look back, wearing white, holding roses.

## GIRL WITH A FUR-TRIMMED DRESS

*Fille à la Fourrure,*  
Toulouse-Lautrec, c. 1887

It's not a dress, and he hasn't got the lips  
right. I'm surprised you sat long enough

that he did you from behind – ostensibly  
prim, wearing that orange coat you lied about

losing, which I replaced for you as a gift  
and which you sent back to me without a note.

He knew you twenty years before I did –  
Oh how I fell for you, swooning beneath

those dizzying fingers, your green eyes wide  
with something I thought more than haste.

We met at a small supper outside Paris  
one late August. I wore black, you black

and white. By then your gold hair had gone  
off, but I could feel your body: They never

understand that, how a woman's flesh holds  
a woman lover long past youth.

He never undressed you or your mouth  
would not be open, and you never

looked straight ahead – always your eyes darted,  
hungering toward the next enthusiasm.

But he got how you sit, those haunches  
holding you down, and clipped you at the hip

to please you, though I suspect those days  
you found yourself slim enough to welcome

mouth or finger, had we some brothel afternoon  
lain like those whores he's so famous for.

But what you lived long before  
 put you off any touch or so I now believe –

the darkened stair, footfalls, another woman.  
 Surely your hair has gone dead gray.

I like to think of you looking out windows.  
 He's got the blue just right and the walls

like bleached fire, orange coat, and creamy  
 fur encircling your shoulder like meringue.

I am finally now as I was before you  
 except when I recall – not how you looked

in high middle age or the graze of your hand  
 but the pitch of your voice – which I turn from

seeking indifference, or a life  
 whose passions would not have been futile.