1994

Bill of Sale (Lenoir Museum)

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I've known this all along, 
or so I keep insisting 
to quiet the troubling thoughts 
that won't be still.

A piece of paper 
dated 1862 in a nearby county 
records that for twenty-five hundred dollars 
a young woman named Liza 
was sold as a slave.

A minute ago we were outside laughing 
in the Tennessee sunlight, 
planning a picnic 
beside the Clinch River where grass 
lures people to lie down and drift.

Now a shadow, the darkness of history 
uncomfortably close at hand. 
I feel stupid and thick 
in my body, unable to believe anything 
until I see it with my eyes.

And I see the farmhands and the owners, 
red dirt stuck to their boots, and their faces— 
not grotesque, but ordinary— 
and the wagons waiting, horses chewing, 
and a black woman, her face hidden, 
a breeze kicking up dust 
around her bare feet.