

“Dreaming Winter” by James Welch

Don't ask me if these knives are real.
I could paint a king or show a map
the way home— to go like this:
wobble me back to a tiger's dream,
a dream of knives and bones too common
to be exposed. My secrets are ignored.

Here comes the man I love. His coat is wet
and his face is falling like the leaves,
tobacco stains on his Polish teeth.
I could tell jokes about him— one up
for the man who brags a lot, laughs
a little and hangs his name on the nearest knob.
Don't ask me. I know it's only hunger.

I saw that king— the one my sister knew
but was allergic to. Her face ran until
his eyes became the white of several winters.
Snow on his bed told him that the silky tears
were uniformly mad and all the money in the world
couldn't bring him to a tragic end. Shame
or fortune tricked me to his table, shattered
my one standing lie with new kinds of fame.

Have mercy on me, Lord. Really. If I should die
before I wake, take me to that place I just heard
banging in my ears. Don't ask me. Let me join
the other kings, the ones who trade their knives
for a sack of keys. Let me open any door,
stand winter still and drown in a common dream.