**Here Is Where**

In winter. In the winter. Winter in the. The winter. The winter in. Home again.

God of the duck-call, my arrival. What’s the answer to that question? She knows it. And who do you see that I am? God that coughs in my ear, protect me from sicknesses, ill-wills, infestations. Don’t hold me between two bodies above the water. Call me and my lover by our true names until we learn them.

That smoke curling the side of your house, is it harmless? Lean into me, clan of my words.

If these are good letters, they’ll be necessary. Like the way your name sounds, to me it’s hands. A monument to thigh. Won’t you show me the roads you ran down, the golf courses abandoned? I wouldn’t. How far until the boundary? Whichever dogs come back, on whose porch the yellow light stayed, I was pleased to have met you. Like two boys, we stare off past a tomb.

What’s one beautiful landscape without a wood fire to make it real? So close to Arkansas, yet none of us lives there. Talk about souls in unison. Isn’t that a sight about ghosts though? How they can sleep so quiet and no one wants to see them go? Standing there, swollen by the rain, your cheeks looked like apples. In winter, repeat after me: *in winter I am tall, I am loving.* Say it: *I am handsome, I am patient, I am well endowed, I am kind.*

What haven’t I seen, because I closed my eyes: Jesus, at my arrival. January’s midriff showing you beneath the fog, our love for a road, caught up under trees like a hand into a mouthful of fescue. It’s not what I wanted, but it’s what I’ve always wished for. My mother’s maiden name, where eyes meet. Blue tracks of the dove, our teeth marks beneath the lids, the red eyes. Gold hair that sparkled in anger. The bright red eyes of Ellsinore’s white stag.

Meant every tear, letter. What died there, as we walked over it? There was the common-mouthed God of the buried root cellar, and the old God of invisible sheep. An edge surrounding us. A house fire, or great crimson leaf sometimes. Having re-routed the river, we asked nothing of each other. With black lungs beneath our eyes we walked for miles then drove. Remember? If all else fails, my lover, my love must go on someplace. Its ghosts must.

So like a mouth that reminds you of a cave sometimes, we moved through the forest in those days, careful and poetic, believing. Ghosts in the rafters. Ghosts that cleaned the river stones. Said things like, “And this is how it feels.” We wanted to tell them we were leaving. O we wanted to. O give me this hill-country, was I powerful enough.

Rarest of beginnings: who you see that I am. I mean. Winter in the Cherokee, where above ice handled branches, into a pond. Every quarter turn in life chokes back, seeing its reflection in the side of a kicking deer.

Blowing, through weeds. Troublesome fire, what’s good to a hollow? What’s a smoldering valley without eyes to behold? Sycamores whisper between them. They called it a barren when it was without water, but now it’s got a café. Cowgirls holding ribbed candles like they’re waiting for a choir-leader. Give me your eyes. Give me your keys. Your washing machine. I’ll lend you my hand.

Be here. I want to make a life with you. Here is a barn design made out of yarn. Here is a paper doll of my mother. Here is my family’s property. Here are pictures of a cabin. If you don’t, I am a song you won’t remember. Apparent of history, but not my only story. A rock of ages.

My backwoods lover, since your initial absence. I was ready to show you entire mountains devoted to our love. Your blue hue surrounds us. Deciduous trees that are the first to enter, and the last to leave, never quite fill a canopy. Can you hear me rocking, do you see me? I am there where you exit. Where you locate our God, I am there, building us a two-storied trailer. If you aren’t already afraid I regret to inform you. Entering from center-field. I’m sorry. I know how this whispering wakes you.

When the doubtless and beautiful co-mingle, some see a dove, others a broken arm. It is everywhere, our kingdom, and somewhere, piled with correspondence. I see wanton appliances in a culvert. What do you want? Once you told me a backyard and wicker chairs. Like how a tree mirrors the bottom of the bird inside it, I wanted a friend.

Time is informative to that. Just as affection transfers itself chronologically, all the time performing some aspects, they share a tendency to speak before being seen. Love that exacerbates distance, will you follow with me?

How will these letters reach you through the valley?

What you can’t say in church you can fill with what lies toward it. As soon as I got a breath of fresh air, I started praying. I stopped hearing the train. I was ready to greet birds at their level. Swimming with a mission, in clicks and flashes. I build a monument to rise above this dual-bodied earth. Of our moment.

Could I find you, standing in the blue dress in a blue room, if I searched for you? If I fire, would this ghost-lode stop your heart? O how you Ozark mountain through my arms. If it’s held above you, would it burn you if I held it out for you to kiss? O great Lebanon, my city walls must be that clean. Until time means love means more. Here is where I want to be the kind of heart that clears.

As you exit, I am where. In winter, even the roads seem cold. My other lover won’t let me cut my hair or call myself *In winter.* I’m like, love, hello. Can you see the arches gradually closing? Can you hear the ghosts inside each tree making music? Each new quarter-turn in life is a lake house guarded by a big red dog and a dulcimer-faced man.

Here is where I want to be the kind of heart that clears.