



PROJECT MUSE®

Hammered Dulcimer

Lisa Williams

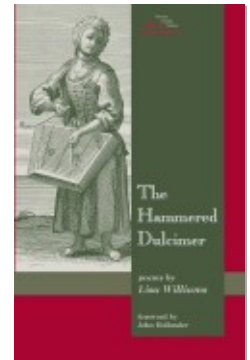
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RATTLESNAKE

What I remember is a cabin
deep in the woods,
the pure cold air my lungs drank,
and that the earth
was unusually hard, packed tightly
under a thin layer of leaves.

We ate dinner, and I remember
what a child would:
mere flickers, bursts of laughter.
Later, from a window
I heard rustling, harsh words.
You led me to the yard. A snake's head
oozed onto the dirt.
Its blank eyes glinted.
One end and then the other
of the body flexed and whipped
in a twisting rhythm
that dislodged leaves and stones.

When the writhing stopped
you grabbed the snake
and carried it to the kitchen.
After curving a knife along
its quiet belly, you pulled back the skin.
I felt if I looked long enough
I could read what was sprawled there,
tangled and glistening.
Then you tugged the heart
from its nest of arteries and veins
and handed it, still beating, to me.

It was firm and vivid red;
cool, but the pulse sent heat
into my palm. I walked outside
to watch the heart pump
in the eerie sheen of moonlight.

And that's what I have left:
the warm, dull throbbing of a heart
held carefully on my open hand
before I let it fall.