Empire Burlesque

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Tell my love the life-like
run through thus to halts,
a fist upon the hip, with her—

tell her then begins the shuck
and ratchet music, the gearworks
& levers, the whole shebang—

telephone tonight and dwell
upon the canticle's
pretty good trick—

the hibernal, then the sash
of summer, float bugs on the water,
cottonwoods—she'll say:

better level the reveler
than talk about the dew point
and the cider, and the field

with the fog in it—
cattails lopped haphazard
and a donkey's racket

down in the swale—
humor her—whack the carpet,
toss the dust puppets,

harvest the hokum,
crack the window open—
slap the happy—

wear the juju necklace
and watch the cat watch
the weaver bird
scat the old song
across the lot, (two oaks
in full leaf)—

and the hiccups
hieroglyph
woven into thickets.

Could it be they’ve entered it, a signature,
a signal, demarking an extent, another limit
to beguile a ‘limitless supply,’
despite her bad elbow, which burns as they play?

Though assiduous with the ice
she keeps hoping the trouble away

with good whiskey and candles,
and the smaller flames of *Buffalo Gals*,

and *Five to My Five*, and *Sweet Afton*.
—or could it be what the empty air’s become

when you’re not around fiddle music
anymore, but think you’re still hearing some?

Molly T. and her *Band o’ Lyres*, for instance,
hot-footing it to make the last ferry
past Poulsbo in the smoking Datsun, 3AM,
the trunk-latch broken and back seat
piled to the mirrors with patch cords & mandolins,
and Bill the Bass w/ his O-ring mouth
mussing up the window vent.
Soon everyone and her brother will look out
for the shape and tenor of the day—
high overcast, gauzed with blue. . .

you wanted something else?

For now the moon shoulders through the scrim.
They make passage in a darkness
smelling of new paint and bunker fuel,
wedged between an Alpha Romeo &
an Omega Farms egg truck. Bill yawns,

settles deep into his creaking leather coat.
The ferry churns for Elliott slip
& they sleep
like monks to thrumming, demon-like drums.