

WOODS WOLF GIRL
CORNELIA HOOGLAND



Wolsak & Wynn

A girl walks into the woods.
Little Red Riding Hood.
Nothing in her life has prepared her.

She's speechless.

A girl walks into the woods with a bucket –
she's off to get
creek water
for tadpoles she keeps
in a gallon pickle jar
on the window ledge in the back porch.

She walks down the hill
across the field of picnic tables,
through western hemlocks'
ladyfinger branches

dripping
last night's

emerald rain

water

sloshes against the bucket's
galvanized
edge. It begins

with an interruption.

MOTHER

The trees in this country wear suits:
men's suits, church suits, tailored business
suits. Under-
stated. Pressed. Worsted
wool over flesh, over
bone.

Trees so tall you come up to their knees. So close
you smell the steam pressed into their stiff pleats.

The rainforest slides down its zipper

and my eyes turn

the evergreen
of true
adventure – not knowing what
will happen next.

The same green fever in her eyes
makes me shiver. She may never

emerge.

RED

I arrive at Grandmother's house.

What's the matter, girl? Cat got your tongue?

It was guilt

that struck me
dumb. Weak-kneed
and smelling of sex, I fell hard

on Mother's thou shalt nots, her wagging finger
roving up and down my childhood, zippering it shut.

Good morning, dear Grandmother. I've brought you a basket of goodies.

I shake out the cheerful tablecloth, lay out a picnic.
Eccles cakes, marzipan.
Find an empty jam jar for the wild trilliums I picked
and the pink flowers in their bell-bonnets.
Pour her gin straight up
but mine

I learn to swig in the tool shed with the boys.

WOODSMAN

A girl walks out of the woods with a bucket of blackberries.
Her purple lips. Her plaited hair
a rope of sun across her shoulder.

Her mouth is ripe

as the berry bush the sun drenches
all day and now
it's afternoon.

It's all in the story: the adults'
need to give (and have children receive) protection.

But there's always a wolf; the girl
is always eaten.

MOTHER

Could be the thing that happens
is at its core

a need

composting inside you. Could be

your soul makes it big –
tosses hands or eyes
or teeth – enormous teeth – onto your path.

Step over the roadkill, miss
the clues – well,

tripping is another way the world can slow you down.