

ANNE BARNGROVER

| **IF I START TALKING ABOUT IT NOW
I WON'T STOP HOLLERING**

A man once told me sweetness
was the highest quality a woman

could own then put my name
down as *Trouble* in his phone.

And here I've gone
and said too much already,

for this is the country of fat
threading through muscle,

the land that bleeds corn syrup
and brown rivers that flow

in directions I can never
recall. *Stop speaking. Now smile.*

This is how you keep
a story from being told—

mothers teach daughters
what knowledge they write

in bloodlines and what they must
trace into silt or wet snow,

each letter erasing itself as soon
as it's exposed. I have learned

that sweetness is love
 thrown back in my face.

I have spread a map across
 my knees and dreamt of all
the places I could flee—
 the better states (not many
after all) with better laws
 (my body still not my body
wherever the corn oil sun
 rises and falls) and then I saw
a picture of myself as if
 from afar listening again
to your endless white boy
 search for God—oh, there's
the God in your weekly
 Poker game, God in your
grandfather's barn, God
 in your goddamn manifesto
on human consciousness,
 God in your marriage

to a much younger girl
 who believes you've hung

the moon, and there's God
 in your painted bedroom,

God in the bleakest heart
 of your coldest Midwestern

woods—where any woman
 would be a fool to go alone—

the God who has been there
 for you all along, who was

made to look like you,
 who never wanted me.

They tell me, *Trouble,*
 let down your hair. Use it to hide

your eyes. Tell me how,
 then, do I still see shame

as it courses through
 the aching silence of lineage,

this rusted river that stains
 its color on my hands?