

ANNE BARNGROVER

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

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?