

As a Grown Woman

by John Cantey Knight

She recollects no romance in winter's hard weather.
The harsh accumulation of frost over long weeks
extends just beyond the fire's roaring,
but doesn't count in daylight when farm chores
force men out and leave women warm by wood stoves.
It's at night that the chill holds to hewn walls,
and the fire can't heat the recesses of small rooms.
Movement is confined to the hearth till flame-gnawed
split logs are banked to smother in the dark.
Smoky oil lamps are lit. Tired, it's time to sleep,
but first, spit baths are taken from bowls to wash hands
and face, armpits and privates. Bodies are draped
in long flannel. Coverings of cotton quilts
smother rope beds and cornhusk mattresses.
My wife can't take the hard cold. When winter winds
howl, she remembers gaps in the raised pine floor
and cracks in the mud-chinked log walls. She recalls
awakening to find the washbasin's frozen water.