

“New Flower Rules”

On Water Street, the humming of pink neon,
the false fronts of shops forever changing names.
She likes the sleek noir gleam of the cruising cars,
the backlit group of boys across the street,
their laughter shifting, defining them in the twilight.
August, the air clad with something tarnished.

She turns left, head back into the sullen town,
the damp dime store perfume of flower beds,
the skeletal light of television in rooms
where a child rocks back and forth counting to ten,
or a couple's shouts fall from an open window
over the soulless stare of toys left out in yards.

A dirt road leads up to the cemetery.
The entrance has a sign, New Flower Rules,
warning when a clean sweep will be made
of all grace decorations. The moon is full
and low, a dusky orange. She likes the soft give
of cinder, and the names' fleet Quebecois:

Thibodeau, LeClair. And Anne and Marie Dulac,
“Mother and Daughter, Faithful to the End” -
two tablets merging halfway down, their years
effaced. She bends to pull some Queen Anne's lace
from their grave. Sits awhile in that moonlit spot
above the risen light of public places.

Then downhill to the bridge, its rough, wide arc
of granite warm beneath her hand. The river
is dazed and slow, leaf-dusted, black.
She leans over, looks down at no reflection,
lets go the weed and watches its sluggish progress.
Clean sweep, she says, clean sweep, and likes the sound.