

No Contest  
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CAROL GUESS  
*from* Rogue Agent Burlesque

GRAYLAND

Cranberries stain boot soles blood red. Smell of scrub pine and salt. The road stops, starts again across the water. Because there's no bridge here comes the thrill of forgetting. The light's green, and holding, but what is it holding? No mistaking this coastline for Finland. Signs sell whole farms: *Ocean Spray contract included with bog*. No one's harvested these reds in years. Days of driftwood and rowboats, gumdrops, fisticuffs of school. Grays Harbor drinks from every floater. The night train whistles past Aberdeen Junction. This is how you get here: stay.

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FLORA

It becomes about something else. Someone who planted trees in the yard leaves the yard. If it weren't for morning you'd fall to your knees. Beautiful unmade bed and a cup of coffee. Days of hunger—why live there now? Easier to watch night fall than to collect it in dishes. Cars swish signatures down dotted lines. Sweaters sheath sachets and bullets. You've been alone with one question for a very long time. Birds with three wings, a house made of tires, blossoms unlike your garden of weeds. Not mail but stamps spilling out of the box. Beautiful carvings—no, claw marks.

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NEITHER GHOST NOR VISITOR

Empty trousers billow with wind, trail me knock-kneed down the street. Cold snap, frost in my mouth—nowadays I need a voice that holds a house. Not this symphony of absence. For years my father has been flickering the lights. Every spider I've ever murdered leers down from a milky web. The dead stalk me, waving like British royalty from porches and pick-up trucks. Sometimes I mix the living up. Music floats beneath the floorboards. Evening wraps around the day. Dog goes wild for a cat made of stone. I paint red slashes over doors I should avoid.

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MY IMAGINARY BIANCA

Cast off your sleek surviving wing, salvation and desire framing little rooms above an alley. Something necessary fell away and what was it you wanted, lonely as the door to heaven? The war goes on, and the new drugs, each creamier than the last. On my walk the sky darkened and I believed in omens, low hum of wings that wait on my mistake. It doesn't take much for hawks to drop and a country to close its doors to its people. *Are you now or have you ever?* Planes survey clear-cut and food courts and fjords.

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CAROL GUESS Guess is the author of two poetry collections, *Tinderbox Lawn* and *Femme's Dictionary*; two novels, *Switch* and *Seeing Dell*; and a memoir, *Gaslight*. Forthcoming books include a poetry collection, *Love Is A Map I Must Not Set On Fire*, and a novel, *Homeschooling*. She is Associate Professor of English at Western Washington University, where she teaches Creative Writing and Queer Theory.