

consider
references only to
he & she

Owl Hammock

smells
sounds

Rubber boots stationed on the tracks of
the yellow tractor, he reaches inside the cage
& begins padding the ledge narrow ledge
behind the seat with his camouflage
overalls. They smell faintly of ^{metal} foil. No
sick-bed bedding, no smell of antiseptic soap.
Not this evening. Soon, never again.

Careful not to slip on the muddy tractor
tracks, he steps down, crunching the cold
dead grass and slope toward his pickup. Opens
the door & says, "Get 'n go."

His wife Tina turns her head ^{his way} toward him and
the delight of the evening car flares in her ~~weak~~
~~pale~~ green eyes. She smiles -- that same weak
smile he's gotten used to. Sort of. But she looks
stronger in the outside light, in the green of the surrounding
~~winter woods~~. Oh, yes, there are dead gray hardwoods
interspersed with the pines along the curve of the
beaver swamp. But mostly green.

She is wearing a dark green
down coat and a knit gray
cap with a pom-pom on top.

He lifts her in both the cradle of his arms. (see
note) She feels like a child. She feels light. Like a child,
a cloud. Like a ^{petite} woman with her insides scooped out; which
she is.

(see note)

2
He ^{stands} sets her on the tractor track. She sighs
& steps back, sits on the black vinyl seat then
begins crawling into the back. The ~~gold~~ ^{gold} ~~red~~ ^{red} ~~to the cage~~
reflects ~~envelopes~~ ^{imprints} a queer light on her ~~mass~~
suck-checked face. ~~But~~ ^{Just} like Cap he gave her
for Christ mas last week. (She hooks her gloved
finger into the ~~gold~~ ^{gold} ~~rod~~ of the cab behind her and
kneels in the seat & steps, one foot, then another,
onto the narrow space behind, then settles her
bundled body on the ~~pas~~ bedded bench. She ~~gild~~ ^{gilds} ~~of the~~
~~gold~~ ^{gold} ~~cage~~ ^{imprints} on her face.

He ~~step~~ ^{step} climbs up & turns & sits on the
seat, and her right hand comes up automatically
to his right shoulder. Her sandy ~~hair~~ ^{curls} curls
wrap over the rim of his ~~green~~ ^{green} cap. ~~reference~~ ^{reference} of the

He starts the tractor & the ~~nothing~~ ^{nothing} ~~sound~~ ^{sound} of the
wintering woods becomes loud roaring, ~~the~~ ^{the} ~~mixed~~ ^{mixed} ~~with~~
the rhythmic clacking of the tracks as he spars into
first and the tracks fold over & up and down
the trail he has carved the day before with the
massive blade. (better description -- be there)

into Owl Hammock, the first land he bought after
he & Tina married. He was 27 then, and he'd paid only
\$1000 an acre. A lot in 1983, a lot for swamp, ~~like~~
all the other 600 acres of timber land, he will soon
lose the hammock; doctor bills, hospital bills, you name it
When Tina was diagnosed with breast cancer, they had no insurance - ~~not~~
"Too rough on you?" he yells & takes a right
through the swamp. (with foot)

"No," she whispers into his ear. She kisses his
cold cheek. He leans back to feel her breath, her
chilled closeness.

Both sides of the black mud track are fringed
 palmettos, myrtle bushes, scrub oak, gallberry, ~~hibiscus~~
 and towering above Poplar, hickory, sweet gum
 pines. The beavers have dammed up all 100 acres
 soon the green will turn gray; already ponds
 have mapped out certain areas & twiggy gray (islands)
 trees with coats of green hairy moss have opened
 up the green of the woods.

Carrying its blade on front like a shield
 the tractor crawls through knee deep black water
~~opening~~ freed yesterday the tractor blades, the
 water had gone in ^{with} & tried to draw two swamps, they
 hammock and look for depths to bring to light to
 used to hunt here together & buy or with the best to listen to their cry.
 The water ~~is~~ seen about the tracks

but they crawl on trough, shallow water
 the only ~~indicator~~ ^{hint at another} of a island. (smells, ^{chilled mud} sounds)

"Cold?" he calls back.

"No," she whispers in his ear, kisses his cheek, settles
 back - He can still feel the tingle of ^{Mesquite's} poison on his
 temple and feels ~~she~~ for some strange reason it
 reminds him of his reactions to the ~~small~~ young woman at
 Winn Dixie, how his eyes had ^{been} drawn to her denim
 covered rump stuck out as she leaned over the ~~plenty~~
 cases of food with a carton of ~~eggs~~. Not even his type -
 that woman, Tina is his type - a petite but strong
 ambitious enough to get a degree in Early Childhood
 education ~~after~~ while battling cancer,

"This is the main island in the hammock," he yells. "Recognize it?"

"Not with all this water, no," she yells back. Her voice is bright & strong, but strained for.

"Killing all the timber," he yells back.

"What's the solution?"

"Bomb the beaver, I reckon." He laughs. She laughs. Seams close. Kisses his cheek. "Duck time," she says & taps her watch.

He looks left as the sun gutters out behind the woods. Steers the tractor right with his left foot into a brake of reeds & vines turned into scrub trees. The blade slices into the thicket with a crunch & rustle, exposing blue light, mossy dead oak & water mirroring the blank sky.

When he switches off the engine, the roaring quits & night birds fill the space. The engine ticks, rumbles, the blades settle into the dry marsh grass & the tractor springs slightly (similes)

"You see from there?" he asks & leans back.

"Enough."

Two ducks wobble over the stem crying & splash into the water.

"Look at that," he says & sits, then stands & steps out onto the track. The light is going fast. "Listen," he says & cups his ears. "More ducks." Whining sound, then sliced air, crying, splash. The ducks on the water fret & flap their wings. "Come here," he calls. "Get in the seat."

She Her coat rustles, thuds thumps, & she
is seated in her huge green coat, her
capped head peering out. She is smiling.

More ducks. Their cries so thick you
~~can barely~~ have to focus to ^{remember} hear - the other
animal sounds -- a beaver tail slapping
water, owls hooting, single ^{double} notes; coyotes yipping;
and then a sudden close bright snuffing.

"Is that a Bear?" she ~~asks~~ ^{asks low}

"That or hog, one," he says.

"I've never heard hogs like that," she
says.

Ducks crying.

The teacher smirks & scoops her up
easy, turns to stand her on the tractor back
& ~~they~~ ^{his} boots lose grip on the tracks
they tumble back in the dead marsh grass.

(see
notes)

how can he tell her that her independence ^{could} ~~just~~ make her
feel like shit. (They have been thru all the phases