

*To the First Woman Who Said
"Not Even if You Were the Last Person On Earth"*

by Taryn Fagerness

I

She turns to the sheriff in his black
chaps, her eyes just beginning
to recede into her head
and hisses at his suggestion
or his order—he does have a gun
tucked under his belt
and she stomps her shoes
in a stampede of buttons down
the board walk.

II

Before her, a lady of Greece
in her embroidered sheet whispers it
into the bowl of grapes—
face flushed
the fat finger of a drunken God
picking her up and setting
her body on his
Olympian Monopoly board.

III

We also know the school girl
pulling her books into her chest—
her knees nearly on fire
spitting it at the neighbor boy
as she thinks of a route home
to avoid this picket fence
this patch of sidewalk
rumpled with the strength of weeds.

IV

I am right now mailing this scene:
the glare on my face—
projected there by a violent woman
with a slide machine behind my eyes—
the man with his hand on the building
beside my ear

his red lips
his loafers.
No need to mention the conversation
or context, it's all there
spilling from his mouth
in gooey strings . . .

in hopes you will send me the magnitude
you had, when you told whoever he was—
a desperate pilgrim
a cocky Egyptian prince
your husband
and he felt the world empty
as you turned your shoulder to leave.