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## Floodland: Lorine Niedecker, 1903-1970

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KAYOKO WAKAMATSU

*Floodland*

*Lorine Niedecker, 1903-1970*

who  
lived hard  
    by water  
    only daughter  
of a carp man

and woman  
stone  
    deaf  
    till death  
to all but dirt

(the other woman)  
who spat 'I need  
    floors Wash the floors Lorine!—  
    wash clothes Weed!'  
her last breath

'Anchored here  
in the rise and sink  
    of life' duckweed  
    long stem speed-  
well sora rail plover

a room  
and a half  
    on Black-  
    hawk  
Island

till '62  
no running  
    water  
    but water  
spilling

in Wisconsin  
spring  
    All soft  
    was lost  
dandelions carpets sodden straw brooms

Rock gardens grew in her blood  
her old tools sieve  
    and seine  
    and pen  
'planting poems in deep silence'

like frogs in Basho  
She divorced young  
    no 'diamond fronds'  
    then named Lost and Found  
twins unborne by 'A' poet (Z)

(He married Celia)  
She said 'I don't mind  
    the lone-ness  
    (could she have known  
the aborted in Japan are water

babies) of it  
for poetry' 'I need time  
    like an eon  
    of limestone  
or gneiss' and silence

'takes away  
the desire  
    of possessing  
    things'  
She read proof-

read till her eyes  
dimmed Seven years  
    with callused knees  
    wrists steeped  
she scrubbed floors

in the hospital 'condensery'  
where she stripped down  
    her poems—  
    bombs  
and marriage Frankenstein's mo-

ther ('What was her name  
before she married?')  
    and her island 'more trees  
    for friends than people'  
Then 'at sixty

one does foolish things'  
'What an adjustment  
    companionship  
    deep  
affection, human(!)

happiness  
I fear it  
    upsetting  
    the thing  
that would withstand

the world'  
He took her from  
    'frogs and trills  
    barred owl's  
scary song splashes

in the water which is still  
in my backyard  
    moonlight  
    O lovely night  
I don't think Venice

could be better'  
He drank  
    too much  
    His mud  
splattered her green chairs but

'All my surfaces are  
hard' She  
    knew her place  
    knew agates  
and blood

and wrote of them  
speaking words on water  
    'All my surfaces shine  
    a hard varnish shine  
but looks good to me

renewed table feet  
doors etc  
    after a flood'