Floodland: Lorine Niedecker, 1903-1970

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Floodland

_Lorine Niedecker, 1903-1970_

who lived hard by water
   only daughter of a carp man
and woman stone
dead
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 unborn 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'