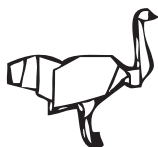


Ashley Shufflebarger

Lovers in Appalachia



Remember the widow woman
down the mountain who fried
dry cornpone at family dinners,
poured Coke in a bottle
for her rowdy toddler?
She always looked the hindquarters

of hard luck, but her Euel
worked nights with your daddy
before the coal dust took him home
and Mama made sure you fixed a plate
for her at the table every night.
Know how Loretta Lynn lived just down

Butcher Holler? You swooned
when she sang proud about the mines,
though the egg smell on Daddy's hands
always made you want to gag.
Remember waitressing nights
at the diner? You once served soup beans

to the skinny dobro-picker
and maybe three hours later
he asked you to marry him.
I want a love like that—quick
as fried okra and painful as rotted teeth.
I want to pine for my man
over a pan of dry bread.
A week ago you cried to me about the divorce
and all the extra bologna you fried
for no one in particular. Part of me
knows you wish you'd not been born
to a family who dressed in burlap,

but now we weave stories where the sack tore,
and dream about young lovers in Appalachia.