Carolyn Gregory

In the Company of Books

What would I do without them, the speeches of cereal kings and young women who assist Vermeer, monographs on hallucinations and intrigue of the antebellum South?

Without them, my travels would stay with street chatter and the hubbub of sirens, my view limited to a few acres of a big universe.

Oh, books full of dialogue and rumination, causes led by flags or solitary minstrels.

You have offered ballads and laments filling my nights with sea voyages and imaginary landscapes when I had none.
OLD MUSIC

The skeletons are rattling their chains tonight,
playing loud music about trust and abandonment

The dancers are not listening to the words
as they are thrown forward in the beat
driven by piano and violins

bending low into a tango
or stepping lightly, hands held with respect

The skeletons slept for some time
between deaths,
lay down in their nightgowns,
grew whiskers and long nails

without news about farms
or claims they could feed on

to grow young again with smooth flesh,
fresh as children
when the dancers first moved together
in a slow waltz
THREE SISTERS IN A STORM  
(after a painting by Andrea Kowch, 2012)

Near the edge of a cliff,  
the sisters share dinner  
on a windy evening

Late September, the ocean wind picks up,  
ruffling the table linen and skirts

One sister dances with hands on hips  
over yellow grass  
as another plays a fiddle,  
her hair blown out and whipping her head

The ocean waves rise high  
in a northern sea  
where a storm rolls, sky turning yellow

In the background,  
house curtains blow out of every window  
as if ransacked by time

while the third sister sits stoically,  
coffee cup in hand,  
watching her sisters make music