

**What a Good Party It Might Have Been**  
**by Nora Ruddock**

That day you were sitting in the horse-drawn sled opening a parcel of cakes and fruit and books sent by a friend, hard snow falling all around. "Wind like an axe," you said. She dropped the tangerines. The sled had to stop, you gave the tangerines to the children and how orange they looked against the snow, against the dark evergreens crowding close. It was hard to believe in the festivities. You said you saw yourself wearing a backpack and walking away, getting the hell out. And eventually it was so, you got away and she wore the yellow silk slip and the red jacket, with that brooch of ivory that made you so uneasy.

Up north we brought all the clothes we stopped wearing during the year. I found treasures, jeans that fit better than my current ones, summer dresses, faded, soft, to wear when the sun was hot, to feel the wind. She in a cotton shift, magenta, moving through the forest to her studio. An empty nest that morning, perfect, small, needles woven round and round. She brought it with her to look at the shape, at the scoop of space, the round, full, sorrowful cup. Birds all fledged, songs tentative in the dawn, the air surrounding, questioning. A falcon cried on down the channel, but far enough, that day, to shoulder against the wind.