

Harriet Tarlo

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Harriet Tarlo

Poems 1990-2003

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III

Roads and Weather

short sequences

life by fire

living by fire only

stone never

gives in

to fire warmth a few feet

around

me around

cold walls

cold glass

family at home

reading beside coal past

trying

to keep our

distances equal

damp black coal shone

smoked thickly

bringing in snow

walking –
breathing coal – thru
winter villages
Bowburn, Langley

miners' relics

wood falls free trees
dying tangling
in living
branches fall
ready
count yourself lucky

I save the piece of coal
that falls through
the grate-hole
rich black jewel

burning eyes staring

beside

fire

wind changing smoke

choking waiting

wood screeching too wet

bleeding yew

loudly

sweet wood burns out blood

in the grate

Wednesday 16 January to
Thursday 17 January 1991

finally
and fire lights

and sheep dog
barks

cars almost audible

finally
we cross

kindling smells like chocolate
drying quickly stacked
neatly

to spark
 any kind of tree

blazes when
war kindles out of
 kin and kin

who is not of my kind
who is not kind

only smaller sticks of wood
for kindling sap
drying
out

I blend hawthorn
with fircone

yew with
elder

oak
and alder

changes light
today flames
white in dusty sunflake
flecks plant dying silver

casting shadows
light dust against
white

cracks in wood
slowly warming
for next winter

I went alone
into
wood

no one
saw me

carried it back
and burnt it

lying to sleep

fire fell into
its own
hollow
down
to grey

coal tastes
like comfort
on finger
pulling
down

called to account
a talent (a sheep, a goat?)
long enough you've had

sitting
counting cones burn
on the cold floor