

Runaway Slaves (True North), 1863

Catherine Sasanov

(For Daniel Steele, his wife Dianna Britt)

Night stuffed its black rag
in your mouth

while the moon leaned in:

the master's lightly powdered
pox-scarred face,

his heavy, fetid breath.

*

She made it look like prayer,

on her knees and fumbling
with Orion's belt,

on her feet and tipping
each Dipper between her lips,

washing out her mouth.

*

To be born in 1833:
freeze or drown—

Your birth drenched
in sheets
of falling stars,

that celestial
blizzard

that never touched the ground,

that never died out

on your tongue.

*

If luck lies only in the single star,

why'd God strew night's floor
with broken glass,

urge your wife *North* when she had

no shoes?

*

If luck lies only in the single star,

why'd it leave you
stranded
on the barest
spit

of land? Why'd its light swim

so hard

away from you?