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In the Corner

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In the Corner

In the corner of the blotter
my great-grandfather left a note:
“Must divorce Henrietta because she ran
off with . . .” and the ink fades
or maybe he couldn’t condescend
to name the man who bested him.

Two children were born to this late
marriage—he was sixty-three,
she seventeen. In the ledger
he wrote, “For Amelia Fordham,
Henrietta’s mother, I found a house,
flour, wood, milch cow, groceries
and some meat. She has the children.
Furnished them with clothes.”

Successful in everything else
his luck ran out toward younger women.
Ann, who died young, was in her twenties
when Great-Grandfather first married
at forty-three. Lovina, the next,
thirty years younger, divorced him
later. In his will he left a deed
to a city lot ten rods by ten,
“out of affection and natural love.”

The third wife, Susanna, blushed
across the altar at twenty-one
and followed him across the plains.
Two children, one my grandfather,
survived of three.

Widowed again, he married Henrietta,
the youngest, fairest, born in New York
City, “educated and refined,”
who graced his home five years
til the man she fell in love with
a second time (or maybe the first)
showed up talking sweet on his way
to Oregon. Henrietta dressed
the children, took them next door,
packed her clothes, and ran.

—Donnell Hunter