

CLAUDIA MORRISON

Confessions of a Sloven

Laziest white girl in the south,
my mother used to say, transplanted
North Dakotan who birthed me in Georgia
(her racism borrowed—acquired
like protective coloration).

Inside the exaggeration was truth,
though our attitudes differed:
I didn't see sloth as bad—
why shouldn't life drawl, amble, dawdle?
Why the rush, why the compulsive busyness?

Maybe the scent of magnolia slowed me down,
the vegetative drift, the languor
of southern twilights turning me dreamy,
sapping my veins of the work ethic.

Laziest white girl in the south:
and when I came north, there too:
for I also was transplanted, mother,
reversing your journey, leaving my southern
childhood at much the same age you left
your snowdrift home behind, both of us
refugees in alien corn.

In Canada your North Dakota judgements
make sense—*Folks should be up and doing,*
the devil has work for idle hands—
maxims not to be slighted when there's wood
to chop and ice to break—no butter to churn,
thank god, but you get my drift. Life
doesn't hang from the boughs up here,
waiting to be plucked.
The air is urgent, cold,
and laziness more dangerous than sin.