

*Ann Carter*

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MARGARET AT THIRTY-FOUR

At fifteen, you wed a gambler in a farmer's church.  
And I, eighteen, stood as witness, my strength focused  
On not causing a stir in that chapel where  
Sunlight passed through dusty curtains,  
Softened all the edges,  
Dazed plain good sense.

Sure, you moved through this haze,  
Said vows for a life I bet would bruise you  
And then he'd be done to do the same somewhere else  
Where the next girl would hope for the best, the reformation.  
Soon you blamed me for, once, being right.

Didn't I say you'd regret it? Didn't you say  
I could do worse? My friend, I did  
And learned a few fine things  
About all my good intentions.  
Margaret, my good intentions!

Now three kids trail you through Safeway,  
And one is in the basket. And life is life.  
We meet by the dairy case, reaching for cream,  
Stroll down the day-old aisle, where the bargains are,  
Each chastened, each selecting carefully--  
Both bread and words.