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Molly in a Red Wig: Plays a Fiddle

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MOLLY IN A RED WIG PLAYS A FIDDLE

Molly asks me take the hanging guitar
held suspended from its two-prong hook screwed
to the wall. The guitar is her brother's,
custom-made in Viet Nam, a body
brown as roux, its head and neck completely
filigreed with inlaid nacre. Hank is
working as a lawyer in Saigon. At first, I
close my eyes and let my searching fingers
find the old positions as in rhythm
I start strumming one four five. She never
names the tunes she plays, just calls them "old ones,"
Gaelic melodies through Appalachian
ache discovered by a West Coast woman
travelled more than I will ever travel.
"Do you know some Hank?" she asks me. *Which ol'
Hank, I think, your brother whose guitar I'm
chording now or everybody's Hank?* I
smile and nod; I wonder which of them she'll
draw, "I Saw the Light," "Your Cheatin' Heart"? No,
neither one will fit tonight. She settles
on a plaintive "I'm So Lonesome, I Could
Cry," and I am watching Molly's bow; she
never counts, her timing shifts for feeling,
she keeps playing 'til imagined dancers
drop, and neither of us knows the lyrics
front to back; they're just familiar lonesome
lines the other guests forgot the words to,
first duet, too blue, October evening.

THOMAS ALAN HOLMES