

DIRECTIONS

Debra Kaufman

To the north three women hunch over playing cards,
 their laughter mean-thin as they breathe out smoke.
 One whirls cocktails in the blender – *what the hell*.
 She knows her sisters are eyeing her jewelry.
 Don't get too close, they don't like to be touched.
 Call these women your aunts, your father's sisters.

To the south three women even more afraid than you.
 They are generous but nervous. They taught you
 what they know. Wrapping you in layers, they say,
Hold down your dress when the wind blows, honey.
Don't go far now. Remember Jesus loves you.
 These are your mother and her sisters.

To the west are all the uncles. See how busy they are:
 they've no time to think of you. Some have cows to milk
 and weather to worry about; one, the banker, must buy
 a new suit for the concert. But any of them, sure,
 any last one of them, would protect you
 if they noticed something wrong.

The east is all yours. It's open to the sea,
 the one place you can taste salt-fresh air and just be.
 The light is blue-white. You can imagine a friend here
 huddled with you under a blanket,
 someone to share an orange with, who likes silly songs,
 someone who can teach you something else about love.