

Yourselves in Headlights

So what if you're a little drunk
and the car flies
like a bullet without a leash on it
and there's a thud
underneath the Michelin tread
and you get out of the car
to carry the warm body
to the side of the road
and the mask is half torn away
and the blood pools on the grass
as you dig a hole with bare hands,
wishing you knew
how to use those hands
to put the raccoon and your life
back together... What if you had to pick one,
your life or the raccoon,
and the raccoon babies were pleading
with you to choose wisely
and your wife was pleading
with you to tell her it wasn't true
and your conscience
was pleading with you
to do the right thing... But it's futile,
it's all futile
so you shove your hands
into the river of its guts
and you tear the raccoon apart,
and then you lift them
into the beams of light,
tempted to lick them clean
thinking
she loves me rabies
she loves me not
but at the right angle
they catch the light
and glisten,
and you stop and think,
one day,
years from now,
it might all
begin to make sense.

A Crack in the Railing

Electricity was a luxury in that clapboard house—
three rooms and ten thousand fleas—

became as scarce as running water
because crack was more alluring than the bills.

25¢ mac and cheese, every night for years,
a burn the size of a thumb on the dull-red plastic bowl.

Hand-me-downs, barefoot in ditches, my finger
tracing the edges of ringworm's beautiful bruise.

For baths, we ran a hose from the neighbor's faucet,
and through the window, by the dim light of the lamp,

I watched Mrs. Morrissey take off her bra.
Once, three hits into the pipe,

my father's friend set candle after candle
in the center of his palm,

lit it and stared until the flame went out,
wax spilling through his fingers onto the floor.

I sometimes wonder what he saw
in that dance of light, and sometimes,

closing my eyes and looking back,
I don't have to wonder—I see it, too.

I still have pictures of it I haven't developed.
Perhaps they'll show me something I can't explain,

or maybe they'll be tricks of the light
and all we'll see is the ghost

of the ghost in the living body,
the shiny forehead, the hollow eyes,

the friend my father pushed
into the porch railing, the crack of his rib

ending the argument
over whose turn it was to re-up.