

The Countdown

This time the dream snake sang to her,

“Scotch and soda, jigga o’ gin, Oh, what a spell you put me in....”

She was startled awake.

She felt her husband coiled around her.

Long and strong

Possessive,

Even in slumber.

Because snakes will do what snakes have always done.

She had read the grisly story

In the News Gazette.

An eighty-pound pet snake

The vacant cardboard cage

The infant

Twenty inches of smooth pink skin

The empty crib

The python

Ten feet of mottled leather

Amber, gray, and brown

The triangle head

Slithering through the origamic night folds

Smelling

Measuring

Gauging

Striking

Swallowing

Because snakes will do what snakes have always done.

Pushing up her flannel sleeves

She looked at her bruises

Blooming

On her pale arms

Showy

Expensive

Orchids.

And so,

She found herself

On this cold February night

Caught in the liminal space

Between reality and hope.

Because snakes will do what snakes have always done.

Then, another assault

The final straw was cast.

Leaving her raw

Wounded

Broken

Like a piñata

On the basement floor.

Because snakes will do what snakes have always done.

In time, her voice became louder than the others

And on a warm October morning

She walked through the invisible wall

Into her new life.

But the worst was waiting

Measuring

Gauging

Smelling

Striking

Because snakes will do what snakes have always done.

The windshield cleaved her face that night

The tree a mighty force.

A phoenix rose and filled her soul

The snake then lost its song.

Because women will do what women have always done.