

progression

It started with a little nothing, a little grope,
you know? I thought, "Oh, and I voted for this goon?"
I didn't tell my friends or anything. Then, he put my hand on his groin

and I felt the bulge of his sprig,
and I got one, too, and I knew he would be my first. Fucking poison
little shit. It got hard fast. Messy desk, heavy grip.

He liked seeing me cry and pink and I'd pig-sing
because I thought I liked it, too. He singed
my ribs with an iron. I wept. The rope

did all kinds of things with skin and breath. Songs
of pain he lobbed across the office. He would rinse
from his lips with his morning coffee my stink, my ripe gore.

I would file and print and fret over staples, pens,
the newspaper, scrub the high-heavening fish guts from my heart's pier.

astronomy

The deckhand's fist glances the boy's cheekbone. He wakes in his room.
Blankets toss him wet to dark world. Legs tremble, stray

aboveboard. Eyes tear holes in black ocean, black sky. His moors
wheel through water, unspooling the yarns

of tavern wanderers. The waves of mind: Santos admiring a don's roan.
Mama's balled fist, weak, pounding his chest. "Soon!

Come home soon, my fool son." The tears and snot
and dirt daubed from above Maria's little lip. The moon

of gold across the sea. The man between his skinny shoulders that most
could not see. The old salt of the nightwatch climbs down from his roost

over the wet planks, inscribes for the boy, with his finger, the X in the stars.

maturing

The hair her father once doted upon hangs gaunt,
runs stringy down her back like rain.

She unearths the face in the mirror, proceeds with a wan grin.
Golding teeth, watery eyes, grim

furrows sprout leafy years up, ladders down, each rung
a root, a wicked age, a loss, a gain.

She had wanted children, or at least one runt
knucklehead whose hair to brush, whose nails to trim

and plant in the sand. When grown, he would turn,
one day, to his left in a shop, a plaza, a train

to find in his ears a ring,
in his chest the scalpel-clear truth, in his gaze the main-

line-struck eyes of deep-dug love. Truing her aim,
she buries the path to her mouth, tongues the shovel's tang.

airport

She slammed the lid of the bean pot
when her daughter – on this day! – refused to part

her hair. The nerve! Her own long-denied trip –
The gall! – seethed in her pit.

Now that goat-headed regurgitated water rat
calls out of the blue from a washed-up hooker's tarp-

cum-douchebag. She'd seen the gleam of this trap
before. The father in touch. The icy teeth. The roar

of the wounded young. "Ava, I will rap
you so hard if you so much as tap

a finger... I can feel your eyes roll." A rump pat.
The girl slumps into a kitchen chair. A pair

of scissors splits the ticket. A comb rives the top
of Ava's head down the middle. Out crawl two kinds of rot.