

## **Closet Dwellers, We!**

Crawlers! Alit  
in blue florescent, blended  
against the creases, tucked  
beneath the tongues of cast away sneakers  
glowing!

I have been searching for you  
since I first learned how memorable your sting:  
liquid fire  
I want to sip,  
but fear;  
protect myself  
with clapping shoe bottoms and flat-souled  
stomps. Wary.  
Close enough to stay distant.  
Reveling in darkness that irks  
and compels me.

I envy your unpocketed confidence, so casual,  
sprawled close  
catching life.  
Let me taste the tip of your birthright burden,  
Closet Dweller!  
Creep! Crawl inside me!  
Take me to your quiet creases  
and I'll give you  
*all* my shoes.

## **Muddy Women**

I love muddy women middle-aged,  
frayed silver crowns  
bleach-dried highlights  
sun spots and thick skin.

I love watchful women who pause  
long between words like herons  
hunting prawns—  
waiting.

I love wily women who wake early for work  
then flick decks of cards with calloused hands  
under camp light late.

I love the mess of a woman laughing  
through the struggle of a paddle,  
of the stroke of her brush  
quietly painting her cheek.

I love women who crotchet love-shaped  
punishment with sideways glances  
bitter-full of knowing care they say boldly.

They're the women who wipe my heart harder than I think I need  
with their rough-stitched handkerchiefs  
woven with wires stiff as the strands of their unkempt  
braids. Their wisdom  
fine enough to catch me  
strong enough to wrap me.

They're the women  
who drywall dust suits  
and leathered sweat begs to cling.

Their skin I know  
like their hips. I know  
the fit of them: hot—pressed wet  
jeans too tight at the thighs. I know  
the curve of their hands

without excess cradling the pen.

Their fingers, delicate lace

I know. I know.

I love to watch women wondering

if I would have become one of them

had I just been willing to do the sort of work that grows callouses

thick enough

for that shade

of muck.



slowness.

It's how I keep my tongue  
from jumbling the chords  
always busy  
always sliding  
down this brain. I have

always  
been this way. Once, as a girl,  
getting my nails trimmed by my dad,  
he cut me too close to the quick and I squealed,

*Don't clip my testicles!*

I have always been this way,  
losing sight of sound when I say it

just in time to fumble  
the buckets and  
stain myself  
visible

with mistakes. Women are built for  
visibility. Unpluckable  
hairs always seen.

Skinned statements. We show respect  
with our bodies. We perform  
with our lips

expectations that differ  
from this body I have now,  
there is an expectation  
even words.

as a man  
I don't fumble,  
Now,

I can linger,

legs apart, chest uncovered, chin upturned, lips licensed for any speed I need

while they wait  
wondering,

*What is he planning?*