## 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.

## Mismatched

I supervise a man
his hair always unbrushed the story
of his mattress in the bags
beneath his glasses. Nicotine
drags him from meetings away
to unsmiling silence where he wakes
and re-wakes slowly
across the day

as we wait.

I wonder, watching him standing legs apart, chest uncovered, chin upturned, lips blowing,

What is he planning?

On any day I wake, I shower fresh, right away—regardless of sweat. Shave shiny raw. Shampoo. Double duty I massage conditioned hairlessness. Scrub my beard trimmed to third guard measured to the edge. My towels smell of laundry crystals I supplement to enhance detergent like cologne against my collar. No toes touch my mat but my own when wet, then it hangs. My body deodorized; container stacked on a dusted shelf, then I file my nails round suppress the cuticles.

I mismatch
words
when I speak
seeing rhythm coded
quick as I can but I need

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, as a man there is an expectation I don't fumble,

even words. 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?