

Lorian Brown

Need

Small tag ends, umbilici
signal rows of tiny bodies ready to split.
Dull green, shining, this mess of peas—scars
like the scars on fingernails, nail beds struck—
these are the mothers. Split them open.
Thumb the raw peas out. What curls
in the womb, or never does.

O peapod—fat little peas inside—you
are what my mother wanted, child after child
to prove how capable she was, my young mother
gaunt, tight, collapsed into her box of a house
turning and turning furious, though she put seeds
into cups of dirt on window sills, showed us
how the new shoots always turn toward light.
What she gave up, her delicate work in the lab
transferring frog skin from one live frog
to another, noting which grafts healed,
which sloughed off. Her world was at war.
Men leapt from torpedoed ships, dove
into burning diesel. Children burned in cellars,
in chimneyed ovens while she stood in her kitchen
shelling peas to feed us, feed herself,
new child sprouting.

Nocturne

*The long grass lies down in September,
wind-licked swales shining in sunlight
like the thickening coats of calves or fawns
too old to recall rough June tongues
pressing them up from grass*

summer we lay mouth to mouth
in the narrow bed, scissored lines
a kind of scrim, false witness,
not what it was—your tongue
and my tongue those June bug nights—
carrying the water up, quick wash
in late sun, vodka on ice, ice too
carried up. And my not believing it yet,
believing this too would fail

*close-lapped blades still glistening
for these with no knowledge of barns,
no memory of descending into
the black cold beneath the cedars*