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Jennifer Jean
Fishwife and Shore Siren

I used to be
petite.

Then, after him,
I mushroomed out, stout
like the women
beating rugs, pinning laundry—

the women tied up
in aprons taut
under profound breasts,

the women consuming
vacant harbors, vacant beds,
the lifeless skyline.

I used to resist.

Then one day, my shriek
wove into the great yowl
of the women and I
drifted

atop that rip.
What happened
to the muscle of my voice,

how it carried me? Water
used to mute it, spread it
evenly, cradle it
to a destination—a gift.

Now, we ravenous

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women shriek
at the butcher, the market, each other,
our boys, rough pups in alleys;

our mouths gawp all day;
but later, in slumber, we open,
moan, *Love...*

me...
where are you?

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Fishwife and Seascape

I lie

and tell the painter I'm from an island
and he laughs—

it means I belong to the sea. And I laugh
because we're laughing. I tell him,

living on even the smallest rock
piercing air above water
means, I fear, I do not belong to the sea.

I watch him color in another window of white.

The ocean slides from his brush like a green flood
and for a moment I think he understands.

But, out of the blue he caps the sea—

his sky's blaze and violet streaks are wholly imagined

as our afternoon seascape blanches above us,
dull passage for the gulls and eyes.

What is this for, I ask
staring at the gushing sunset or sunrise.
It's for you.

I drift then, homeward,

knowing I must move
beyond tolerance and love
the land

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or I will take on a god
awful lover.

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On finally leaving Little's Lane, in Peabody MA

Moms with men
with single moms—I've known these
slight girls trudging
the length of Little's Lane
to that tilted beige building
with its first story glass gash.
All year round, on foot,
they pass the iron basement grate—that dank vast cage
restraining
contrabanded sunshine
canaries—the men's domain. These girls
lope like my mother.
They unwind
from second or third shifts,
their infants lulled by bent dark
grandmas. Their infants cling like I clung
to aged aromas—powder and spice—
through colic and longing.
Their muggy men lounge
in the lot with cars on blocks,
on all long days. I hate them
letting beautiful toddlers run at my car
when I creep past, staring, my crimson car
rocking over ruts
and deep depressions on Little's Lane.
Someone take a stab!
*Move! I want to say, Patch that window wound,
that eye-sore, with duct tape
on radiating fissures.*
But I know Peabody,
and all these parts of towns
—even now
winter busts in

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past glass incisors and curtain tongues.
In this way Peabody breeds
paralysis. And later, the concrete breath of summer—
that boil, that hornet—
will gust hard into the unmindful maw,
choking and keeping
every last innocent
ignorant.