

Hollow

Nell Smith

The summer my father moved to the guest room
I didn't say much, even my journal evasive
all vague references and hushed asides

I spent hours high between
the rafters and stacked bales
chewing blades of sweet hay, staring

at the plump brown bodies of barn spiders
dark stars in the constellation of their webs
the twist and shake of a caught moth

Once, mucking the stalls below
a moth flew through my open lips
its body sweet and musty against my tongue

for a moment, the taste of mushrooms
and chamomile, the delicate brush
of its wings in the cave of my mouth

then it righted itself, flew back between
my lips and out into the night air leaving me
open mouthed and transmuted

From the Gallery of Natural History

Nell Smith

No. 1

It always starts here
evergreen branching out
 needles tight
 against the cold
memory of slate-blue
 winters
the farm named for
 the north wind
where I came from

No 6.

Think of the hummingbirds
 clustered in
 sucking nectar
from the flowers'
 slender pale necks

No. 3

Then there is the straw-
colored snake
 with blurred eyes
 that bleed
 into the time I believed

that *The Red Pony* couldn't end
 with the mare Nellie puffing
 and bloated
and Billy with the steel hammer
 yelling for the boy
to *turn his face*

No. 8

The bird has no eyes

No. 4

 and now I can't see
the snake's translucent skin
 without it transforming
 into the drained veins
 of my mother's hand grasping
the fetlock
 still inside
 our mare, sweat-soaked
 her lungs like a bellow
the foal
 breaching
breaking

No. 2

Notice the delicacy
 in a tube of honeysuckle

like those that snaked
 up the leaky siding
 of our barn's south face

No. 5

I want to turn my face
but do not

No. 7

Beyond the snake
is a bird
 mouth agape
slate-blue feathers
 the color
of a stillborn hoof