

The Unfolding

Melissa Kalinowski

Sometimes I feel heavy, laden,
waterlogged.
I'm trying to swim.
Everything is black and white
and shades of gray.
In the sky are screens that show
flashes, pictures of my life, his life,
the tired woman at the corner store
who knew I stole the gum but
didn't say anything, the boy from
English class who ran away from home,
twice.

Those were places we were then . . .
gathered in a stranger's woods
around a bonfire
lying on the ground talking
with unsteady smiles.
We aren't there now.
That doesn't mean I can't still
see the shine on my aunt's curls
on a Sunday morning.

I sense Sean's body, lean, toned
as he walks down hallways,
feline, on the prowl like a tiger,
only, a tiger in a high school hallway -
tail bumping against lockers.

I know now that at those moments
I was on fire and didn't even know it,
not until I found the cinders
inside my pockets.

That voice, his laugh,
it takes me through years of
myself - as a girl unfolding.
I will never return to those days,
those smiles, my fevers on
October nights when Mom

worries in her room:

“It's 102°, go down, go down . . .”

I'd like to go down, go back,
to mulberry tree days and fireworks
at dusk - I can't do that.
I will never be those people
and places again.
They remain just around the corner,
in the dusty mason jar on the top shelf
that you could never reach.
Lives seem stagnant
but they are always curving,
shaping you from sidewalk
hopscotch, scabby knees, and
grandma's pea pod garden.
You shape to watching faces fade,
hearing that your heroes gave up
dragging burnt out stars behind them -
a dead weight, and
coming into your own -
the life you knew was coming.