**Needy Little Cephalopod**

Amy Marques

 My fear is an octopus locked in a dark box that I keep in the closet, behind the snow pants I never wear. But octopi are wily, and they Houdini out of anything, tentacles creeping like an army of periscopes before they slide all the way free.

 My octopus, Stan, is the quiet sort. He patiently sits in his box and wiggles his tentacles for exercise while I handle bills and clogged toilets and the mouse that likes to visit my garage. He tries to make himself small when my children—they’ll always be my children, even when their hair is grayer than my own—take too long to return my calls.

 He’s always been good about behaving when I really need my wits about me, like the time the road was so slick that he retreated under the seat and let me drive all the way home before he showed his face and unleashed a trembling that kept me sitting in the car for a full five minutes before I stumbled out of the garage.

 But on beautiful nights, when the stars invite me to play, Stan spreads himself out on the lawn, showing me the breadth of his reach. His tentacles pull me down and wrap around me until I’m locked in his embrace.

 He whispers that he’ll never let me go.

 My ribs can’t expand. My arms can’t push him away. One tentacle presses against the lump in my throat and another smooths my hair before tightening around my temples.

 You’re overstepping, I tell him.

 His bottomless eyes beg for affection.

 He doesn’t mean to be rude, he says. He’s been waiting for a good day, he says. He’s been working on his timing, he says.

 It’s easy to overstep, I reassure him, when you have eight legs.