**Complicit**

Lorrie Ness

As a girl, there was no way to outpace

the coming of age. The faster I ran away from its chase,

the sooner I arrived at the destination.

Adults told me to slow down,

to enjoy childhood — which they never seemed to recognize

was just another name for powerlessness.

The day after my step-uncle showed me porn,

I returned to my third-grade classroom imagining my teacher

crawling naked on the ground.

Her round cheeks, her A-line dress

were no longer matronly. They were a façade for what lay beneath.

Suddenly, there was no shelter. For years after

I thought of women as predatory.

I could still see the lady’s eyes beckoning on screen, her hands

winding a man toward her with his tie.

So many routes for survivors to arrive at shame.

So many routes for surviving shame that can lead to burial

of abuse. My step-uncle’s

guilt became my own need

to delay adolescence — my transformation to huntress in heels.

I fought against growing

into a wanton woman. There was no safety in the moment

and no refuge in the future. So I clung to the powerlessness of childhood.

Each time he came around

was proof that I was not yet a predator.

Being used was my only affirmation that I was still good. And I’d come —

running like a junkie for the next hit.