**When I Get There**

Sera Gamble

When I get there,

I discover I can only afford

a landlocked carpet stain

off Ventura. The super asks

if I’m an actress. When I say yes

she tells me about the one

who was found cut in half

not five miles from where I stand.

Everything I own fits in that drywall shoebox

next to the studio where Britney once rehearsed

wrapping her schoolgirl body in an albino snake.

I stay up all night, decoupage

the ceiling, read dead woman poets.

In screenplay structure, I’d be the girl

hitting bottom, but oh, don’t worry: a page away

from being saved. Still,

there will be no man with blinding

teeth to arm me back from my own edge.

So I just get up the next morning.

You can get anything

in the Valley. Just drive.

Cocaine and acai bowls, pedicured toes

you can suck by the hour, rare first edition

Nazi glass eyes, acting lessons

from the dude who squeezed all those Oscars

out of Hilary Swank, suntans of sprayed paint

or real radiation, Edenic flowers

sold cheap out of a bucket. You can drive

a wide loop forever, mind smooth as a floor.

In this way you can stop wanting things

for hours and hours.

A girl can go on a long time out of habit.

I swim the blue pool. Audition for the role

of Willing Victim. Swallow the next vitamin.

There’s the super at the mailbox,

suggesting I try harder to get married

while I’m still pretty in a certain light.

There’s the super at the trash chute,

side-eyeing my disreputable shoes,

furious that I’d squander years on a dream

everybody knows won’t come true.

There’s the super with her latte,

her ankle weights, her little dog, transformed

in the presence of a handsome student

with blinding teeth, in need

of a lease. Why don’t they warn men who want

to go to medical school that there’s a chance

they’ll get the urge to slice a girl in half?

That they’ll hold the terrible knowledge

of the perfect point of bisection?

That this might haunt them

when a girl laughs in their face?

Or, okay, I’m being serious now,

why don’t they tell girls the truth?

It doesn’t matter what we want to be;

the world is a knife.