

## Jared Pearce

### Girlfriends

There were things to like  
about the dating scene, meeting  
new girls, hearing their stories,  
getting to hop into their lives  
for an evening or a month,

and then out, unscathed, maybe  
wiser or happier. And when I quit  
my job no one cared or thanked  
the work I did, the friendships  
and the trials. It was just over,

and I went back to zero, without  
the tenderness that comes finding  
a hairband in the sock drawer or  
a creased photo showing for an hour  
or two everything mattered.

**Tug once for more line, twice to be pulled up.**

The dawn never scared me  
until you refused to wake up,  
clamping the dark to your face,  
screwing yourself to remoteness,

as if the day had seared your sight  
you tied an old sock across the bridge  
of your nose after you clogged the doors  
and windows and anchored your hair to pillows.

I couldn't take the depth—  
I had to get to some light,  
which meant I had to see

your obscuring, your drift—  
a rift and a drowning,  
a wreck at sea.

**We see what we can see.**

The stump left  
from the chopped  
tree is gushing  
sap—streams  
roiling the just  
mossy bark,  
staining the earth  
a foot in all  
directions. Like  
a volcano, I  
said, megalithic  
force driving  
to the surface,  
unaware, uncaring  
for consequence,  
just pushing.

She took  
a look, Like  
a mother, she  
said, who's lost  
her baby,  
and her milk  
keeps coming in.

## Guilty as charged

I'm sure he didn't wake up  
thinking he would be a murderer,  
the boy found guilty in the second  
degree. Just like I'm quitting

my job today, but I didn't begin  
in that vein. I wanted to pump meaning,  
deliver nutrients, oxygen, trim  
down to the muscle and matter.

My neighbor burning something  
out back didn't plan on the smoke  
hotboxing his house, but there it was,  
like how an organ's absence will fill

with fluid—there's never nothing,  
we agree to live a certain way,  
until we burn up the garbage before  
the cops can show, or resign

for a healthier life, or drive a knife  
through a heart, draining  
the first machine we fall in love  
with, wondering why we did it, afraid.