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Three Poems

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CAREY MCHUGH

Instrument for Oversight

The way the hayloft holds this view: unmanned
fences, the increase of instance, of cattle

the persistence of this lamplit, inclement year.
Patient, eventual, brittle, misshapen

and one fault lower than fear: your childhood
is prairie-evident, delicate, waiting to leave

in pearls. What I want is an instrument for oversight,
a partial dissolve of silver and its grasses strewn

and your voice in the light rot of perfume saying
the bug is not in our bedding. Mint and sorghum mark

the farmhouse wall, another thick skinned thing, the latest
waste and despite the oversight I recall the hayloft

straw-dark like a winter sun, the bales tacked in ricks
brick-heavy that you hooked out over me one by one.

Cannery Manned by Patients

Clarity, now and again, hems us in overhead
like a cylinder up and slow, or from below,

awareness muscled loose runs fox-sized, momentarily
red. We are forbidden during working hours to consider

headwaters, knotted gillnet threads, the pale setback
of salmon. Though farther north the banks are wide

with drought. We have stopped believing in doubt,
have learned to measure heft in tonnage and linen sack.

Among us someone has singled out monotony, locked
it in, dropping as we assemble, as if from hand or eye

a boxed rhythm we are fighting. All night belted here
fingers loose on bolts and cobs. The stale business of tackle

to sift through. Here the sick collect. And the slack strain
of the jagged wheel rolls tongueless in its kick.

Woman with Her Throat Cut

after Alberto Giacometti

First came the emptying,
a sound like bats feeding

in the bottomlands, and after
a wish for wild cattle, water

oaks, and mud daubers
cracking in the beams.

What did we know of collapse,
of the arch of collapse,

its stenciled seams. Of husk
without seed: this ruin we enter

into — enters us, her bent knees.
Her lungs, oblique wings.