

Cry Baby

for Brenda

In the gut of West Albany, in a fading white Sears house
with pale blue trim, above the cellar where she shook
to Janice singing *Cry Baby* wearing a glittering belt of

lemon-colored plastic, in the rough and out
of the fold, across from the First Prize
meat packing plant and through the acid

scent of blood that came from it night and day,
out of the gutter, through the pipes, up against the ropes,
against the system and stickin' it to the man,

before the run to Florida and the baby doll pajamas
that were her uniform at the Bottoms Up bar, after the twenty-one
year-old boyfriend and the flesh marking her as a woman at twelve,

on top of the man, below the man, before the mirror
shifted in light to reveal her body as that of the freak
ZAMBORA THE GORILLA GIRL, before her son bloomed

like a fist inside her womb in the trailer of the headless
woman, between the years in the group home
and the months in county jail, before the coke the coke

the junk the coke the reds the blues the booze,
after her mother said she did not want her, made her
a ward of the state, in the cut the heavy camera made

into each of her palms, before the abortion at fourteen
and through the screams the pigs made in the night: there
in that fading white Sears house, she discovered

the old sharp-creased vellum with the generic
BABY GIRL KENNEALLY pressed into its fiber
like a blue tattoo, the paper that rested in her

the day she stood at the top of the stairs and threw
a whole dresser at her brother, threw it and then kicked the living
shit out of it, that dresser that she had sanded and

antiqued and stained rambling rose pink by hand and then
shattered in a wild-eyed rage, the dresser on which
she would lay all her most precious things to admire

as they shone: and here in a broken pink drawer lies the baby
twisting in the scrap of her West Albany life as Janice's throat
fills with splinters to sing *Honey, welcome back home.*