

CIRCE WITH HER HAIR DOWN

How beautiful to kiss him on that edge
of soda and Jack, the glass
like a cat on a top limb arching
its five hairs toward his lives.
The tongue forgets itself.
The teeth forget their days
and twenties in the sock drawer.
The lips are two cracked moons
drowning in a hotel sink.

Soon the leg curves to your
ankle in bed and his foot
takes the shape of a lobster's hook.
The face resembles his house
and clothes sleeping
in the darkening yard. His dog
retches in his kidney.
The link fence sings and is
not unlike his ribs. You learn to love

the smell of other wives
on his fingers, the foreign stitch
of warwounds. You conjure
an island, shake the bad weather
from your head, and still
a sea collects in the bathtub,
all his former addresses
erased—

and the body is here
because it cannot retrieve where
it wants to go, to whom. Comb
his hair and he assumes
you are a woman willing
to live in this country.

—Susan B.A. Somers-Willett

SELF-PORTRAIT AS INTERSTATE 10

Still, the sky is the great equalizer.
Still, I yawn into the visible: yellow sun,
shack, mountains of uncertain
range. What gives life
are two directions: *to* and *away* like a decisive
heart. The saguaros wave
in the way of surrendering bankers.

What is it to be a sign, a coffee cup,
the grave of a doll's discarded leg?
I end, I begin, I have known death
and have doubled back. I am the last
gas station on its three stilts rising
out of the sea; or the child born there.

To hear the ocotillo burst
into white laughter after rain.
To be the keeper of distances,
defined by landscape and trash.
To the foal of cows in spring
and the crossing corpses of Texas,
I say, *Come unto me. Leave.*

Here a cross marks
the earth where three sisters have buried
their animal. Here the dung
of a beast grows sweet to dry
in the sun. To know not night,
but the fading of a lamp. To live
the constant grey of a bayou.

And here, in Lake Charles, towers
of sulphur flicker and that hell
singes its lit *I's* against the good

white clouds. Here swamp, bay,
monument, tin can with a mouth
ragged as a Southern woman and I
am her spine pressed to the bedsheet.

There is no home, only postcards.
No relationship unmarked by distance.
Of all things, I am the same

photograph taken at different
times of the day: me, the lyric
of truck tires in a deluge or
me, those years of dark
water in a plant's heart or

me,
that small animal blooming
in a hawk's fist—not
drowning, not waving,
but falling out of the sky.

—Susan B.A. Somers-Willett

WHERE HE LIVES RHYMES WITH ROME

but mostly he calls his house *lions*.
He knows there is a petition out
for his relocation, or his arrest. *Home*

is a word he uses most when searching
for other words, the bookstore. Days
begin with *um*. The names

of his children sound clear
towns in his head, although incorrect.
He has begun to write things down

per the doctor's instructions. MARQUEE
is a woman's yellow jacket, the walk sign
at 22nd and Lex FINE INDIAN CUISINE.

His cat remains CAT. His daughter
CLEOPATRA and what was that one,
the gentleman with the thin green tie, OLLIE—

CLEOPATRA AND OLLIE LIVE IN NEW BRUNSWICK
WITH THEIR TWO LOVELY SHOES. He asks
the store clerk for a *silver* and

some change has come upon him,
he cannot quite place it, he remembers
the flowers in his right hand with the note

FOR BRIDGIT which of course
means TRASH ON WEDNESDAY
because everything has been

replaced and the visits
are few, or many, when the cat
perches on the window and raises his tail.

—Susan B.A. Somers-Willett