

Christopher Bakken Denial

We were hard at work with the starving,
a dozen white plates set out before us,
one copper coin in the middle of each.

We had learned to love what wasn't there,
our last milk left out for feral cats,
the barren pantry showing off its ribs.

Just yesterday, I'd braved the city's heart:
those avenues of squid and monkfish;
sweetbreads and steak displayed like relics

on their pillows of blood and melting ice.
Knowing I had resisted was enough
and I returned with unfilled paper bags

that you spent the afternoon unloading.
Here's the final pomegranate, you said,
making me gaze into an empty bowl.

Every night, in spite of such discipline,
hunger arrived an hour early, wanting
to collect on its debt. We didn't budge.

We bargained our coins, and even the plates,
mixed the rest of our flour with ashes
and let goats clean the bones of the garden.

In the end, all we had left was some air.
That would be our offering to the horse.
We hauled it out and waited at the wire,

but she pushed it away with her muzzle.
What she wanted was already here.
The grass she couldn't reach under our boots.