

KELSEY ANDREWS

Leeches

1.

Back then, I dreamed like a leech
cold in water.
When something came that could fill me
I filled myself full.
You were something I ate
until there was more you in me
than me.

2.

When I was young a hundred tiny leeches found me all at once, perhaps just hatched from eggs. I imagined a mother leech releasing her spawn on me, having found a big warm mammal for them, first meal to set them up for life. The babies infested the outside aspect of my left leg from hip to bottom of shin. When one leech caused screaming and terror, what to do with so many grazing the lightly haired plain of my leg? Nothing but stand, still and stoic, exposed on the dock in my swimsuit, as my mother salted each tiny leech and picked it off. I do not remember fear, just a disgust shared between the tiny leeches and my own flesh.

3.

Leeches are precious, too
It's not their fault they must feed on swimmers
lucky swimmers with so much blood
let the leeches be

4.

Long ago my sister and her friends collected leeches—lake vampires, tiny terrors. I do not know how they caught them, but legs dangled in the water must have been part of the strategy. The warm blood of a child must be better than the cold thin offerings of fish, and they came, to be caught in a small silver bowl. My sister and her friends crowed as they brought the bowl, put it on a stump by the fire pit. Years before I had saved a captured leech, set him free again in the lake far from the swimming dock. They'd laughed at me. This time I did not save them. I was busy, and besides, no one had named me protector of leeches. In the afternoon one of the dogs lapped the water, thirsty in the sun, and when we looked in the bowl later there were no leeches.