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"Leech," "Blue Whale" and "Elephant" (poems)

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University of New Orleans

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Award Name: Ryan Chighizola Prize

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Leech

Benjamin Aleshire

Ryan Chighizola Prize Winner

Call me a parasite, sure —

I can't change the body

I was born into.

We all must eat, somehow, no?

Me, I have learned to wait —

You'll come running to me

when you need relief

from something you don't understand,

when even your blood

betrays you.

for James

Blue Whale

Benjamin Aleshire

Ryan Chighizola Prize Winner

A relic of an older world,
they call me, but
I have out-lived ice-ages
& I will out-live you.
Even when my body drifts
to the ocean floor,
I become a garden
glowing in the darkness.
I am so large
that I have no concept
of fear, of danger:
I almost envy you
your human folly, where
everything you do is sweetened
by risk.

for Dierdre

Elephant

Benjamin Aleshire

Ryan Chighizola Prize Winner

If the heart is a building —
 (with its chambers & atriums)
my mother my architect built for me
 a palace.

But there are too many rooms
 & no one inside them dancing
 so many mirrors & undisturbed pools.

A beautiful thief is coming soon
 to plunder me I know it
(I can feel her even now scaling up my walls,
 leaving a map of her bare prints
 through the rows of my hushed gardens)

for Isabella