

Mermaids at Midnight

by Rhonda Pettit

We swam first,
naked as old shells
the tides scrub to shore,
then lay high among buried nuns,
watched stars in their decline and felt
the August air press us,
heavy as dirt.

We'd all had trouble
with love—husbands and children
continents away from our writing retreat,
or the thing itself so deeply layered and molten
we only knew it through
eruption, the odd fissure
an eon would close.

So we laughed
about the night watchman
who had peeked through the pool fence
and said, *Ladies, let me know if you need
any help.* We'd saved ourselves
with water, darkness,
and the muted

pool house light
that blurred the lines, the lacks,
the excess of our middle-aged bodies now
drying on the cemetery concrete. We laughed
at the shade between death
and desire, knowing how
it shaped us.