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HALF-CROWN

Emily Brown

Robyn Schiff selected "Half-crown" for the 2019 Yellowwood Poetry Prize. She writes, "Descending backward into girlhood via etymology and memory, 'Half-crown' is a forceful, understated poem about the violence of keeping secrets and the relief of their release."

the artists are absent
instead here is a file
of all i remember
there was a painting of a boy
with penguins in the background
and reflected in his eyes
the etymology of pupil
as in the pupil
of an eye
is from pupa
meaning not fully formed or
girl, the same as pupil
as in student
as in a forming bug
the victorians sometimes called
locking eyes
looking babies
the small reflections of self
seen in the eyes of another
your baby self and mine
engage in a shootout
like playing a game of chicken
who blinks loses
the idea is that stoicism is good
and hot and honorable
i never shot first but

i look to fill
and will never take what i want
i remember on the playground
cupping my hand
around the ears of other children
pretending to tell a secret
and spitting instead
is that cruelty?
i think i just wanted
to know what would happen
the kind of thing
you only get away with once
the thing that disturbs me
is i can never remember what happened
after, i mean, meaning trouble or
a hard hit to the sternum
other stories i told
were truer secrets
in the slumber party schedule
this was the last thing before bed
i recounted the worst thing
that had happened to me
in every detail
which maybe explains
how it all comes back
just like that
i liked how all the girls
would lean forward
to better hear me
with their bodies
the sad thing is
i was just early
i am never surprised
to hear of anyone else's
it is assumed like all banalities
you grow older
you hold your rape
under your shirt
like library books when
an unexpected rain comes

i don't tell the details much
there are no more slumber parties
and it would take a long time
for us all to have a turn
in the coffee shop
the barista and a regular
discuss the woman singing
and how fame ruined her lyrics
and voice
and how they liked her so much
when she was new
and young
she is on her eighth album
it is too bad
they both say
that anyone else had touched her
we all have our collectibles
everyone is an archivist

EMILY BROWN's writing has appeared or is forthcoming in *Denver Quarterly*, *Bennington Review*, *Prelude*, *Sonora Review*, *glitterMOB*, and *Lambda Literary's Poetry Spotlight*, among others. She is currently an Editorial Assistant at *Poetry Northwest* and *The Iowa Review* and received her MFA from the Iowa Writers' Workshop. She lives in Boulder.