

ELLEN GOLDSTEIN

A Ton of Flesh

inspired by the book *The Town that Lost a Ton Using the Buddy System*

It began with small losses:
a pound for every cookie left uneaten,
three pounds for each meal skipped,
the slow drone of flesh draining away.

They set up a network
of informers, a buddy system
to encourage them: "You take
up too much space,
no one wants you anymore."

And so they ate only lettuce
without dressing and sipped
laxative shakes for breakfast,
spent hours on a machine
running nowhere.

Hunger became success
as they shed hips, breasts,
and thighs like old clothes
they no longer wore.

Their husbands began to look
right through them, their children
had nothing to hold anymore.
Only their buddies could want them now.

What town can afford to lose
two thousand pounds of human flesh?
Does the town grow lean like its women?
A ghost town populated by skeletons
and the empty rattle of diet soda cans.

Ellen Goldstein has had poems published in the *Southern Poetry Review*, *The Formalist*, and in *pettycoatrelaxer*. She is an MFA candidate at Emerson College in Boston, Massachusetts.