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When I open the door a boy stands there

Abstract

2015 Booth Poetry Prize Runner-Up, as selected by Ellen Bryant Voigt

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When I open the door a boy stands there

by Rachel Contreni Flynn

2015 Booth Poetry Prize Runner-Up, as selected by Ellen Bryant Voigt

not a large boy but larger than me and he's destroyed face puffed red and wet he smells of sweat and rotten shoes and faintly of pot and stale shit and he falls toward my chest and that's my chest holding up a stranger a boy my breasts on his face which is wet and he says *I can't I can't* and I push up his shoulders a light shaking then soft shouting *Are you hurt? What hurts?* and then *Where is your mother?* which seems the only thing to ask in trouble and he pulls from his back pocket a good-

sized knife by which I mean it could cut a cantaloupe but not a watermelon that's what I think of the wood-handled knife shiny he produces from his floppy jeans and so I take it from him simply as if I might turn to cube melon for snack and he stares at me considering the knife and the boy says *Mr. Flynn* and I can't figure what my husband's father in Illinois could do with this knife or this almost-large boy destroyed on my porch in Maine and the boy says *I came to make him pay* by which he means my husband his principal and the sky is very white it's very blank and my shirt is creased wet just at the left breast and the boy says *But I can't* and I don't ask again but lead him easy now

to the chair-and-a-half in the tv room that's covered by a ragged cat blanket and the boy breathes ragged then easy now folds his pale body into the chair covers himself with the cat blanket he doesn't know any better and that's where the two state cops very large find him asleep still smelling of shoes and shit and now cat of course I had

to call because our son very young will be home soon off the bus with a backpack full of bright folders and he is small and I must not be destroyed now or ever I must prepare snack because I'm here and safe and his mother

Rachel Contreni Flynn's second full-length collection of poetry, *Tongue*, won the Benjamin Saltman Award (Red Hen Press). Her first book, *Ice, Mouth, Song*, won the Dorset Prize (Tupelo Press), and her chapbook, *Haywire*, was published by Bright Hill Press. She received a Fellowship from the NEA and two literature grants from the Illinois Arts Council. A graduate of Warren Wilson's MFA Program, Rachel teaches at Colby College and co-edits the *Beloit Poetry Journal*.