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Two Poems by Jennifer Hambrick

Jennifer Hambrick

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JENNIFER HAMBRICK

The Secret Horse

We're not supposed to go there
she says after she asks me
if I know about it, after I tell her no

and we slide between yellow buses
waiting for school to let out
and we run across the street

slip through a row of junipers
and the damp darkness of
a stand of maples buffering

tract houses from the noise
of cars and children then down
a hill to a clearing

creek trickling on the other side
of a bent wire fence.

I don't know what she's doing here

my friend says. *Only me*
and this one boy I took back here
know about her.

You took a boy back here? I ask.
Who?

Shhhh! She glares at me.

The chestnut mare steps
her forehooves into the stream
leans her neck over

the rusty fence nods away flies
gazes down at goldenrod
and sour clover with half-moon eyes.

My friend pulls out
a plastic bag of apple slices
from her lunch sack

I hold a slice in the flat
of my hand and the horse
picks it up

kissing my palm
with the soft, wet flesh
of her muzzle, looking at me

then turning away as though
she knew she, too, was doing
something she shouldn't be

as though embarrassed
to be giving herself away
for the price of an apple

Treasure

The vacuum bag is where
she hoards her quarters
her dimes go in the glass pitcher
on the kitchen table
nothing under the mattress –
that's the first place
they'd look
she says.
Grandmother calls “lunch”
and while bronze baby shoes
of phantom cousins
slouch in dented patina
on the living room hearth,
I pass the blast from
the window air-conditioner
head down the hallway's
sagging floor into the kitchen
where the shuffle of dish washing
has erased the linoleum
in front of the sink.
In the scent of summer
vanilla wafers bronze
banana pudding with a crust
of crunchy tokens
medallions of cucumber
and tomato spiral high
red-green-red-green
on a chipped china plate
farmer's cheese crowns
rounds of Ritz crackers
and stories, so many stories
swirl in the air
like the chocolate coins
tossed to the wind
flashing in the sun
at the Fourth of July parade.