

Fetching

Because aggression damns us to a clumsy  
intimacy with what we misunderstand,  
I took my big plastic lime-green

baseball bat and pitched to myself  
and knocked with a shivering *thwonk*  
my last Whiffle ball across both fences—

our six-foot wooden one and their  
waist-high chain-link, and the weedy ten-foot  
no-man's-land in between—and watched it

land like an empty skull among the sad  
toupees of grass, shed quills of ill birds,  
and a dead tree's old propellers of seed

in their dusty backyard. Within minutes  
a woman my mother's age in a flimsy  
worn-out dress led me through their house

to the back, where she set a foot on the snout  
of their scabby little sausage of a pit-bull  
so I could kneel and retrieve my ball—

so I could see, as the dress pulled back,  
her legs and their dark inflammations,  
dizzy with bruises, pitted in a pattern

concentrated at the ankles. Sure,  
now the mind lurches at causes—  
but we have to ignore what I had no idea of

to see what I learned: What skin felt like  
when it crawled, and how to begin the unfinished  
education in how to feel indebted

to what makes it crawl. All because,  
like some ancient city's founder, she showed me  
the way and kept the beast down;

all because she dipped her hand  
in a birdbath's stew of bugs and cigarettes  
and flicked it on the hide of that which

had not yet learned surrender.  
And right there sprang up  
some muddy dream's first bud.