

After Her Stroke

Shannon Castleton

Above this cold chair
they say *vegetable*. Voices like calves
bawling for their mother's teats.
I think yellow squash, summer,
radish the shade of my lips
in sun, all the ways to be beautiful.
Even after five dull children,
my breasts really never sagged.
I cradle them days when he nods
across from me. He spreads his cold palms
on my cheeks, looks deep
though he thinks it's just his face
he sees in my blue irises.
I want to say Lawrence
you never held me right. And when
did you see my legs never sprouted
one blue vein? The kind wandering
down a thigh like a wet blue trail of mud.
You can't kiss a thigh like that.
What I love is my skin, how cool
it presses me. They watch scared.
I breathe to say it and everyone circles
my face. *Scared* I whisper, and they think
I mean me, and who knows
how long they'll weep, pray me out
of my body, when it's what I want to keep.