

# Prehistoric

**Meggie Royer**

At the railroad crossing where my father  
heard a woman scream one night,  
the weeds grow thick like hair.  
A penny could be a spark of light,  
or the half edge of a siren's blue glow,  
her bracelet's last gasp of silver.  
The cause was undetermined,  
but most knew it was a man.  
Not in the way love knows  
but the way the body knows.  
When some mammals developed,  
their backs grew taut with sails—  
different animals, same ancestor.  
Convergent evolution—  
we all face the same risks,  
some of us just with greater odds.

# Valley of Whales

Meggie Royer

*The title refers to a paleontological site in the Western Desert of Egypt, which contains fossils of some of the earliest, now-extinct whales, before their descendants transitioned to living in water.*

Another year around the sun—sober,  
if it matters, each nondizzy second  
worth its weight in copper.  
Back then, a blackout meant traversing  
the sand without a way to navigate,  
before the evolution of land to ocean.  
There was nothing you forgot, then—  
not the entire night before the present one,  
just how to avoid a predator.  
They used to have legs, then—  
bones larger than the park you found yourself in,  
stumbling,  
with no way to get back home.  
All those years ago the land was so shallow  
it could have served as a basin.  
It could have held,  
just for a little while,  
one more pour.

# Recovery

Meggie Royer

When it was understood that dolphins  
contain small remainders of pelvic bones,  
it was also understood that to run  
meant first to walk  
from what was keeping you here,  
that *everything in its right place*  
meant *nothing is wrongly felt*,  
that a room entered  
for a forgotten purpose  
still held its reasoning like a charm.  
There were years when everything  
was left behind  
and years when everything was taken.  
When it was understood  
how some animals evolved,  
it was also understood  
why others chose not to.  
Not for a lack of metabolism  
but for an abundance of taste.

# Seeing Other People

Meggie Royer

When the dams were lifted,  
green scales filled every bed,  
sheets as iridescent  
as the light that fell through them.  
There were people who came face-to-face  
with their images,  
who woke to their own selves next to them.  
Not like a lover but a friend,  
past lives slipping through their hands  
like fish,  
tail end of all the years ahead,  
coral in its angular redness.  
Some outgrew their bodies,  
others couldn't leave them behind.  
When it was over,  
and the fins had fled,  
only the memory of another life remained,  
caught in its celibacy like a storm.

# Carbon Dating

Meggie Royer

In the oldest fossils, the presence of uranium  
changes to lead over time.

The parent,  
slow in its transition to daughter,  
moon like moon to meet moon,  
like the way a child thinks *don't tell anyone else*  
means *there's a good reason not to*.

Most things we wake up one morning  
realizing we haven't done in years.  
Sometimes they change at a constant rate—  
unbelievable, that all the atoms  
manage to fit in one universe,  
that a family can bury one world,  
and it still ends up in another.