

The Offing

for Barry Graham

Derrick Austin

This time mom jokes, *I'm an orphan for real.*
Her father died in spring.

She flips a fried egg, it's spitting mad in bacon grease,
and shame's cold, familiar feeling mists over

my heart. This morning's alarm
is still going off: a chainsaw gnawing a branch
hanging too near a power line.

Your face was all angles the last time he saw you,
mom says. *I sent him pictures when I could.*

Today feels nearly the same as the last
time he visited, ten years ago, all of us watching
Doppler chart a hurricane.

But today's the solstice.

What should I do with the extra light?

Remember mom walking through smoke with breakfast.
Remember watching the city lights with your grandfather.
Remember what you want to say, watching her pass,
when you reflect on this later
in your vanity when you are cold, hurt, or bitter.

I can't tell ya'll how many drag shows I saw, the Year
of 1000 Queens. Glamour infused all I did last year.

I suspect everyone who does not look like me
will do me harm. It's been a year.

When I return to my apartment the first thing I do
is lock my bedroom door: I've done this all year.

Gin and tonic. Greasy wrappers. Too much gin.
I'm puffy and soft. I treated my body badly last year.

Remember my eyes bruised with stitches?
You have beautiful eyes, said the man who kissed me last year.

Your boy went to his first Great Lake. I filmed
the waves to listen to when winter ends the year.

Rain glazed the snowdrifts, crackling like icing.
I death-dropped so many times last year.

When I'm late to brunch and don't reply, friends
blow up my phone. Where will they be next year?

This is what I wish I could tell you both.
He is gone, but we may still have this year.

Mom and I read on the seashore.
Though I'm drifting in and out of thought
like a man floating on algal bloom.

Silence is one way to love someone
if it is done unselfishly. After I fail
to coax her into the water, I wade in

but don't dive under the gradient
waves. I stare into the offing,
its journeys and crossings,

the edge of knowledge, the beginning
of fear, where, as a child, I thought
the ocean spilled out like a bowl

of ink and water thanks to mom,
but it goes on and on.



100 copies of this keepsake RISograph were produced for Dierck Bracken's May/June 2015 show at Pacific Sky Exhibitions, Eugene Oregon. The poem by Mr. Austin, author of *Trouble the Water* (BOA editions 2016), poem responds to Mr. Bracken's artwork. Designed by Andrew Douglas Campbell and Rachel Widomski—produced by students in Publishing in the Expanded Field—taught by Rebecca Childers, University of Oregon, Department of Art.