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Crown

Lisa Fay Coutley

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Lisa Fay Coutley

Crown

Tonight swims with raw root & nerve
exposed to stars & windchill. The living
room disappears. I go to the bathroom
to see myself reflected, to know I still exist
inside pain. Dear gentle dentist who offered
to numb me anytime, how could you let me be
so hungry. So dumb. Such stubborn blood
my father cut & drew for me again & again—
the same old story, same mean childhood
dentist, same red crayons chewed en route
from Catholic school to dreaded cleaning.
Swallow the thorn to become the thorn.
How many times did you tell me that story?
I only remember the last. So many Pabsts.
I imagine now, how carefully you married
your story to its glory, tonguing that bad
molar you'd been silencing with Tylenol
for weeks, until, midsentence, it was loose
enough to spit into your palm just as you
strutted through your past, chewing wax. So
tough. Or so you hoped the world would say
you down through time. Tonight I wish

you were here to walk me through this
strange pain, to tell me just how many hours

you stared into your hall of mirrors, rooting
out your softest spots behind their aches

before settling on the perfect moment to
excise, to cover with rage, to name it survive.