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Art Student

Graham Hillard

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It was not quite surprise, not only wonder
with which I watched him give meaning

to the clay, or lend it. A regular model,
I had already learned that little he did

could be counted as permanent. The figures
quicken from the dead element could live

only briefly, and then only as parts: sure torso,
certain arm, hand too perfect to destroy,

destroyed anyway. This was merely practice.
The trick was to hone something like memory

in the fingers, tune them to movements
so familiar he could carry a conversation

as he worked, laugh even as he folded the forms
in on themselves and began again. What do I know

of such business: how even now it is difficult
to concede the unmaking, the way each member

broke beneath gestures so nearly careless, all
that my body meant, until it didn't?