CLARE WELSH

Love, or Grieving a Beast

In the heat, on the hardwood floor, I lay
    naked with an electric fan blowing hair in my mouth
    and my wolfdog drooling on my thigh.
She has bitten my father
    and I am proud because he deserved it. Tomorrow,
    my parents will put her down—notice how
language grows vague as it approaches
    murder, but I am a child in America in the time of the Great
    Pretending, and this is love despite the horror that is
explaining horror. I am in the woods because I am running away.
    I am on a raft on the Mississippi river
    because it is stronger than guns. The river dampens denim
to a deeper blue. The river killed Jeff Buckley
    but it didn’t mean it. In an abandoned church I burn,
    but can’t abandon,
a Bible. I scavenge the pages, read it
    time. A book of leaves. A house
    on a hill where the bones of a beast
rise up when it rains. I like taxidermy
    because I don’t like burying bodies. At the bar
    of dead deer, I’m finally ready for love.
Love plays me at pool, scratches the cue ball,
    and it’s nothing like poisoning
    a pet on a clean silver table and everything
like a hand out a car window. I am a child in America
    and allowed in bars because no one here can separate liquor
    from a miracle, am allowed
in cars because no one here can separate growing up
    from driving away. I drive away in the key of Bb minor
    which, in 1682, the composer
Marc-Antoine Charpentier described as

*obscure and terrible.* Love rings rude.

A crude palm of pennies, loose tobacco, and keys,

America is not my kingdom, but the dirty snow

where I find you looking so fine, just like that,

holding an animal you won’t kill.