REMBRANDT

"I am what I have always been, the last Renaissance man"
—Hermann Goering

Both see the big picture: history
passé like bob cuts, expressionist film, her husband
gone twenty years. A Jewish Baroness
who the Kaiser he served praised by placing
his silent mouth on hers upstairs from a waltz,
becomes an oxymoron
in German Amsterdam, soldiers clambering
from trucks the latest fad, the next block
the end of everything
like the edge of a painting. Fine lines
like craquelure mar her face.
But Hitler's second has an appetite
he calls appreciation, fox hunts, limousines,
his hand up other skirts. She'll barter
her pretense at beau monde
for a train south, he his principles
the moment he gets her Rembrandt. The master
captured imperfection
with soul-searching craft, his bearded neighbor
half-man, half-shadow; one need just imagine
the stubborn candles and Friday bread.
She's kept her life, her one
worthless belonging. The Reichsmarschall bows.
The war goes well, goes on, art a map
of the benighted world
where small sins burn like lamps.

A FISH

will never be a woman
with black hair weeping in the road.
Nor was my grandfather a man of war
when he squatted in a rowboat.
But mercy became a habit he liked
to show me along with the triumphant space
between his hands. He got old Sundays
out on Saw Mill Lake, yet seemed at home
in the early dawn, cheered just by nodding
at each chain pickerel or pumpkinseed
we never returned
with to the stale repose
of rooms, all those strangers in a jungle
shuffling in snapshots across his mantel.
One I almost resembled, a man more afraid
of suffering than when he went,
just not his own, until at last he fled
downward and deeper
than himself, as if again a thing
of muscle, a faint tug thrown back
to its shadow. Someone had to
make him bigger than he was.

CHRYSLER NEW YORKER

Rock Hudson had one, which my mother liked
to forget she'd already said, and Hemingway
parked his at the hacienda, her not quite
Cadillac still too much for a woman
from islands with a maid's accent. Or so whispered
the stares. She thought she'd earned a man
not a house full of dowdy furniture,
my father's late nights with whomever
like he was trading up after sixteen years.
Reckless, she steered all the alimony
and some of the child support
into impressing herself, her midlife crisis
gold with a gold interior
and that there wasn't someone else.
She washed it more than she drove it, an event
just to deign Shop Rite with her presence.
But she'd adjust our seats and barely
lift a finger, tell us the places we'd go,
and like when someone spins a globe,
after cornering, slickly let the wheel glide
through her hands. Someday never came,
just the throb of merengue
from woofers stashed in crushed velour, her children
from a broken home leaving it in style
as we sped down the hills and straightaways,
flashed through the bright, expectant air.