After Walking Too Close to the Woods at Midnight
by Traci Matlock

1

Not if the figure is hiding but when will she strike.

I bought a pair of anonymous gloves at the corner store last night:
my fingers slipped in unsure up to the knuckle first, then so easy the whole hand
thrust into the white cotton interior.
   Like the time I sucked a peach pit

   and inadvertently
   swallowed it. Startling, really, how quickly what is foreign
becomes familiar inside a body

how if you swallow a stone you can trace the path it takes in you
as if pushing the stone through dirt with one finger

then, suddenly, it is lost, pushed too deep in the ground
to be recognized as ground or not ground
as stone, not stone,
pit, not pit,
as you.

2

Sometimes I stand with my back to the blackest hole in the line-up of trees

   hoping for it, swelling already in anticipation
of attack, overcome by nothing

as great as my desire
   for loneliness, or

   as great as my desire for lust so thick it is conflagration
it is fist after fistful of hair
   the body turning red

   everywhere it’s not
being pressed, held
down or pushed back
and in those places, flesh

fleshed out –
    wet apricots
    in the bottom of a bucket
    smashed with the back of a spoon.

3

I cannot be the first one
to define eagerness

like this: once I stuck my hand in a tree
    and the shadows flew out of the birds

4

If you are patient enough
you can eventually see in the pitchest dark.

The shapes of things are subtle, but at least they are shapes.
You must still walk with your hands
in front of you, protecting, what? Your face?

    Once a car drove onto the grass field in the middle of the night,
    pointed the headlights toward the edge of the woods
    that dropped off into the bayou.

Nothing else happened. The car turned to leave and the tires carved
a circle in the ground. It was all that proved
he had been there. It was pitiful. It had the look of a face

in sunken relief,
    but that was too easy. It must have been the nubshape of an eraser
that never worked without leaving behind pink bits of its body.

5

Descriptions of treetops give you away the same way clouds do.

    Tonight: One is the shape of the moon that rises
                when it’s not supposed to. One is a reflection of the field
                below it – stretched out, de-boned.
I cannot be the only one
to find someone else’s chewing gum on the tree trunk and,
    forgive me,
    chew it.