**Breaker** *by Louise Wilford*

She surfs on a keyboard, bit-lip bright with blood,

left eye shut so she doesn’t see how deep the water is.

She chews the insides of her cheeks til her tongue

is metal-sour. Outside, the water bubbles in the back yard,

the lawn a muddy pond; thin seas aggregate in the patio cracks.

The slats of the wooden herb table groan, rosemary

upended, plastic pot rocking like a cradle in the gale.

She feels the itch of information labels on her skin,

tight sting of split fingertips from too much washing dishes,

pain in her shoulder from lifting toddlers. She is lost

in a sea-fret of contingencies. She can hear the fog approach.

The ironing mountain staggers to its feet. She won’t surf

on the ironing board, refuses to flatten fabric, refuses

to gather up toy cars that mine the room like mousetraps.

Twists her hair til it hurts, scaling the cliffs of her plans,

sledging fearlessly down hair-raising notions that crumble

like snow in her hands. Her shoulders are hunched like a bear.

Knees ache from too many stairs. All she can smell

is old ink and dust, the rusting detritus of junk words

in a scrapyard. She skims the peak of a wave, tipped white

as a hare’s ear, crouches and balances, slides down the tunnel

of blue-green saltwater, hearing her own heart’s pounding,

the thunder of her breath, the scream of the blood

pulsing through her veins. There’s a bruise on her thigh

from when her dreams caught the edge of the dresser

as she passed by. She’s not always careful where she treads.

Outside, her car bathes like a hippo in the river of the street.

A cataract steams from the garage guttering; wet litter is pinned

to damp fences like bedraggled bunting; grates overflow.

She can feel her muscles flex, relax - recognises the life

diffusing in threads through her skin as she struggles to rise,

to balance, to stand. She knows she must catch it

before the breaker sinks its fingers into the sand.