

KATE GASKIN

Poem in Which You Leave

Springtime, the azaleas
in pink fire, the baby there

beside the rocking chair
on my parents' front porch.

And you are where?
Here is a monotony

of baby gear, the swing
that clicks him side to side,

a small origami
of laundry, loose bottles,

frozen rings for his teeth,
one breast that gives

and the other that gives
up its milk in grief.

*

He is rolling over
front to back, back to front

as you crouch
in the desert and cradle

your phone. A miracle
to see it at all

from so many miles, the planes
that drone, the wind

that scabs the brush, your face,
the crust of salt and dust

you wear like skin.
Again, you say. Again.

*

And tease me, my boots,
my kin, the wind

in my hair down Elkahatchee
Creek, the shed skin

of ribbon snakes the summer when
we chased Hale-Bopp

down our neighborhood streets.
I did not want to come home

to this, you gone, the ghost
of my legs whitening in the lake,

you kissing me,
you kissing me and then—

*

When you left
I dug our wretchedness

up like a bulb and moved it
back home while you flew

off to war. Now I nurse
from my right side

as the catalpa trees
flush white

and the yard weeds over
in bright green.

KATE GASKIN is the author of *Forever War* (YesYes Books 2020), which won the Pamet River Prize. Her poems have appeared or are forthcoming in *Guernica*, *Pleiades*, *The Southern Review*, and *Blackbird* among others. She is a recipient of a Tennessee Williams Scholarship in poetry to the Sewanee Writers' Conference, as well as the winner of *The Pinch*'s 2017 Literary Award in Poetry. She lives in Omaha, Nebraska.