

Baywatch Dolphin Tour, Galveston, Texas

Sara Henning

*Dark is a way and light is a place,
Heaven that never was
Nor will be ever is always true*
—Dylan Thomas, “Poem on His Birthday”

Grief doesn't have a face like
the living do. But that doesn't keep

me from wanting the ocean,
like a God, to take me in its mouth—

my skin salt-thrashed, the whole
of me eaten through by riptide.

I kick into its frictional heat, that divine
surface tension. Longing moves

like the water, and past the tour boat's
helm, I see it—a dolphin, face

under algae's skin, intimacy before
the ocean takes it back. I search

the eyes like jags of magma until
we become mirrors: the muscular

torso swiveling before torqueing
into a sun-lathed dark. When

my mother was dying, I prayed
for a child to blossom in my body

where cancer had come, her womb
tumor-ravaged, cut out by

a surgeon's rough hands. I longed
to exchange her pain for one

I could believe in – a child cresting
in me, love's sleek animal,

and she would live in the torrent
my body made for her. That year,

no child took root in me
like some creature of the deep.

It took me years to marry my lover.
No child surged from my grief

-bruised body like love seized open.
But the dolphin? I watch it

bury itself in the spume.