

Fractions of a Voice

Caitlin Irish

She softens her sharpened edges, fearing
she may cut anyone who draws near,

dulling the once booming echo
of her voice, until it is

a whisper, baby soft, an antonym.

Two-fifths coffee and three-fifths cream,
she sips to douse the fire, the same

kind of fire that crafted the drink
that rests at the edge of her lips,

the profound bitter taste that would be
unbearable if not for the cushion

of sweet. Two-fifths coffee, three-fifths cream.
She wonders whose idea it was

to make this coffee into less than half
of itself, forty percent of the whole.

She finds herself within the coffee,
her fire reflecting the surface

of a drink rejected in concentration
but loved in weakened amounts.

Despite ceaseless sips, the cinders
remain alight in the pit of her belly.

She puts them out, one sip
at a time, until she is ready
to burn.