

MAMIE MORGAN

## Kin

When Luke stacks his blocks it's like something in the world  
might die if he didn't, a little like learning to add all over again—

five plus five equals ten, four plus four. Only the fate of one  
plus one, he says, is eleven. And shouldn't it be? The way they stand

next to one another like caught lovers in front of a bed.  
A long time ago I broke up the marriage of a man I didn't love.

They'd only lived in their home for a month; she hardly existed.  
We often drove to Myrtle Beach in a black Mitsubishi with the top down.

I am one of those characters you are not supposed to like.  
Like my friend Daisy who wrote a book about Mormon reform school.

It was a true book. It was a book about her life. Someone  
in the class said, *I hate the narrator; who can stand her?* Us poets,

we're even worse, our only miracle being that sometimes  
we ruin and forgive each other all at once. My student Taylor

is finishing her Calculus homework in our creative writing class.  
She asks what it means when an exclamation point stands beside a number.

Who knows. I've just misspelled *sentence* on the white board.  
I've had to Google anything anyone's ever asked. It might have something

to do with that number multiplied by every number  
coming before it. Like when I ask Luke to put away his blocks stacked

perfect as children, and something in him understands time  
for the first time. *How will I remember how to rebuild them*, he asks.

Memory and failure. How could anyone explain that to all of the children  
we love?

# Disciple: the Portrait of a Crab-Picker

Not beauty, exactly. But not either its violation.

As if whatever scars lie  
in the firm knitting of this woman's vest, her cap,  
have slung themselves into some small, observing ocean.

When we go anywhere that doesn't belong to us, we go in as guests:  
guest of her table, guest of her small metal chair, guest of whatever necessities heave  
beneath her days.

I grew up tying the dead heads of mullet  
to wooden dock poles in an inlet.  
We called it crabbing though there was nothing  
verbal about it—  
no exchange of labor, not a thing anyone did, really, but wait.

We were, I suppose, wealthy. It was something  
I'd heard before. The newspapers we spread across large tables  
came from our town but also much larger cities and whatever butter

we had we could use. Even so, some nights flexed  
whatever muscle loneliness carries and as the adults in our upstairs  
kitchen tapped out the beat of Cream's *White Room*

against the hard shine  
of linoleum, I knew that not even the circling heron  
watched over us. When greed is pure, it looks a lot like something else:

wonder      or the small bones of sea creatures flung upon bright light.

I feel a little silly assuming anything about anyone.  
The agility of this woman's own two hands, what to make  
of any doorway, its faint blue oil beckoning against back shadows.

How little is made of where any of us are going. Shells and winter,  
loneliness and nighttime coming on. We have nothing to brace ourselves

but the meat and the harvest, whatever words  
we manage to remember and repeat long after  
we're gone from here, and longer.