

KERRY JAMES EVANS
Leaning in from the Sea

—a line from “Oysters,” by Seamus Heaney

*Too much black in that boy, she tells his father, shears in hand.
Too much ears. Too much nose.
Not black: Pussy.*

But the bitch is too white.
She’s a one-room trailer
at the bottom of a gravel pit.

She was hot shit, high school cheerleader—
she was prom queen material.
Too white. Too trash.

Too slow to keep up with them boys.

■

We ran the ball up the gut.
We only won when it rained.
Senior year, we went 3-8.
I fucked a girl.

■

Fucked the green out of her eyes
and now she walks around brown and blue.

The boys at the trailer plant in Brilliant call her Texas.
I don’t know why. She never married?

She plays tambourine
in a country band Brandon Franks formed.

■

They tied me up for a traditional buzz cut
fit for a football player. Fit for a soldier.

*We’ll make that cowlick go away, boy.
We’ll train your hair to lie right.*

■

Last time in the city, a pigeon
splattered its innards right next to me.

Who'd do that? Who'd clip
a pigeon's wings

and throw it at a person?
All that blood. All those feathers.

■

Sounds Roman. Sounds like soldiers again. Sounds like trumpets.

■

Religion has always been a coin in the mouth.

■

In D.C., Mother said, *Don't you stand up for yourself.*
Don't you go getting in trouble. I don't care what for.
You'll be dead, boy. You'll be dead before I'm thirty.

■

When I lived in the city, which I did, I learned phrases
mean less when you're holding a gun.

■

Which I am.

■

When I lived in Mississippi, where there are no cities,
only snake pits and psychics,
I learned young mothers bear children
out of necessity. Out of loneliness.
That cotton always needs more hands.

■

No need for the combine, boy. No need for the gin.

■

*You won't make it around here.
You got wide between your eyes.
You got something wrong with your gait.*

■

Always leaning in from the sea.

■

When I'm called back to the front.
When the living forget their families.
When bone dust and blood inherit the land.

■

Who will open his own stomach like a Roman?

■

I am holding a gun.