

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.