

THE ANIMALS OF MY SORROW

Ethan Kenwarg

With her left hand, mom
adjusts her glasses clumsily
like an infant learning
to clutch the air.
Her wig is crooked,
though no one says anything.
The waiter brings a pitcher
of water to the table —
fresh sprigs of mint
and lemon rounds cling
to the sides like the big eyes
of an aquarium fish.
Cousin Jane, drunk
on half a glass of wine,
has come to watch her die.
With the kitchen door ajar,
the famished can peer in —
battered pans hang in rows
like roasted ducks
in a Chinatown window.
Muffy, mom's friend
who helped her to pee
once the cancer had eaten
her vertebrae,
looks down at her hands
and sighs. Crimson table linens
drip on my thighs.
Uncle David laughs
like a sea lion, pulling back
his head so that the hairs
poke out of his hooked,
Ashkenazic nose.
The sconces — skulking eels —
peer at us from the walls.
In three weeks, I'll watch
my brother pour liquid

morphine into the mouth
of a pelican. But for now,
mom cuts a piece of rabbit
and offers it to me,
smiling.

