

PETER LABERGE

## Monarch

Inner Sunset  
San Francisco  
2019

I would be ashamed to die this way: monarch

pinned to his back seat, ashamed  
for my last light to be this tapering August,

    this avenue pressing through the fog  
of the blindfold the man's fashioned

to keep me unseeing. The turn  
down Frederick: streetlights, more

pins, I feel them prick my skin. This isn't  
the first time I've felt the hands

    of a man knotting & unknotting  
my life, absolved

of name, story, & volition. Years ago,  
I dreamt a handsome sketch artist opened me

    like an unmarked casket, marked

    the topography of my face with graphite  
until I woke. That tiny snuffbox I'd spent

the whole dream inside, the only one God had  
for me—a genuine snuffbox, rhinestones

mirroring the world, nothing more. That night  
I'd flown & flown from Drexel back

to my dorm, through reverb & rain, wanting  
to be anything but another

rain-soaked obit on the side of the interstate  
in the morning. But this is different: years

later, country crossed, mirroring  
my world, nothing more: anxiety, lightning

inside a parked trailer of horses, stirring  
all night. Different: waiting for the man to turn

into his driveway—for garage lights  
to flower, gallop through sheer

fabric into sight. Waiting for the sputter  
of his engine, the cough & calm of the car arriving

as if from another boy's nightmare, the sudden  
opening of a door, sudden tenderness

as he lifts, then cradles, then carries me—  
room to room—until the union

of olefin and skin, the scissoring  
of the blindfold, too tight to untie. Opening

his mouth, his perfect teeth—each command  
bright & sharp as a retriever's bark, slit

after slit through the scrim of fog  
until even a sketch artist wouldn't know

what the night had become.