
ROSES

On Valentine's Day my roommate took herself on a date
to the tattoo parlor, where they outlined a rose

on her left thigh. I saw her that night, walking
down the sidewalk with the new clean lines exposed

to the cold, the fresh tattoo slick and shining
in its thin layer of plastic. Saw her left black stocking

rolled down to the knee, the asymmetry daring
men on the street to stare. And up close, I saw

a faint afterimage of blood pressed into her skin,
tinting each blue-veined petal red. A bouquet

she bought for herself. She was heading home
to take another aspirin and warm up. I wanted

to be alone too, not standing on the street
with my date's cold fingers locked around mine,

hunting for a restaurant with an open table for two,
remembering the fresh roses on my nightstand.

Six red roses, their clumsy heads
knocking together in the vase, their prickly stems

ready to draw blood, their buds pliant,
their leaves exposing shallow veins.