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My Mother's Clothesline

M. M. Kaufman

Vassar Miller Poetry Award Honorable Mention

I lie with my siblings underneath the clothesline
pulled taut between two wooden posts.

We count the stains mother couldn't wash out. Sins
we keep secret when she's gone and he asks

questions. I am the one who accepts
dares and climb a post that shouldn't hold

my weight, but here I am. The others throw
marbles, hit the back of my head. Laundry

falls, piece by piece, into the breathless ether.
I climb the clothesline until I reach

Cassiopeia in her throne. I take her
shape; *W is for woman, for where.*

She takes my hands and spins
me upside down in her orbit; *M is for mother,*

for monster. Keep me as your daughter of the stars.
I do not want to go back to where my mother

tells lies like she washes clothes. Cassiopeia lets go.
I fall through her hair, through the stars, and land

in the washing. The clothesline wrapped around me,
binds me to the lawn. Hung out and dried, stains set.