"Leech," "Blue Whale" and "Elephant" (poems)

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Leech
Benjamin Aleshire

Ryan Chighizola Prize Winner

Call me a parasite, sure —
   I can’t change the body
I was born into.
   We all must eat, somehow, no?
Me, I have learned to wait —
   You’ll come running to me
when you need relief
   from something you don’t understand,
when even your blood
   betrays you.

for James
Blue Whale
Benjamin Aleshire

Ryan Chighizola Prize Winner

A relic of an older world,
    they call me, but
I have out-lived ice-ages
    & I will out-live you.
Even when my body drifts
    to the ocean floor,
I become a garden
    glowing in the darkness.
I am so large
    that I have no concept
of fear, of danger:
    I almost envy you
your human folly, where
    everything you do is sweetened
by risk.

for Dierdre
Elephant
Benjamin Aleshire

Ryan Chighizola Prize Winner

If the heart is a building —
(with its chambers & atriums)
my mother my architect built for me
a palace.
But there are too many rooms
& no one inside them dancing
so many mirrors & undisturbed pools.

A beautiful thief is coming soon
to plunder me I know it
(I can feel her even now scaling up my walls,
leaving a map of her bare prints
through the rows of my hushed gardens)

for Isabella