

# Mermaids at Midnight

by Rhonda Pettit

We swam first,  
 naked as old shells  
 the tides scrub to shore,  
 then lay high among buried nuns,  
 watched stars in their decline and felt  
 the August air press us,  
 heavy as dirt.

We'd all had trouble  
 with love—husbands and children  
 continents away from our writing retreat,  
 or the thing itself so deeply layered and molten  
 we only knew it through  
 eruption, the odd fissure  
 an eon would close.

So we laughed  
 about the night watchman  
 who had peeked through the pool fence  
 and said, *Ladies, let me know if you need  
 any help.* We'd saved ourselves  
 with water, darkness,  
 and the muted

pool house light  
 that blurred the lines, the lacks,  
 the excess of our middle-aged bodies now  
 drying on the cemetery concrete. We laughed  
 at the shade between death  
 and desire, knowing how  
 it shaped us.