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Chimaera

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Chimaera

By Maggie Reagan

“As you’re pretty, so be wise;
wolves may lurk in every guise.”

-Charles Perrault, *Little Red Riding Hood*

“Absolutely not,” my sister shakes her head
as I step out of the changing room. “Try
this one instead, it’ll make your waist look
smaller and your boobs look bigger
and it’s a much better color for your eyes.”
The saleslady, in the corner, blows a lionlike
fringe of hair from her face in agreement
while I shed, like snakeskin, the old dress.

We were delighted, at first, when we heard
about the escaped animals in Muskingum County, hoping
to see a pack of wolves at dusk, running west
towards Montana and its fierce, far freedom,
or the giraffe climbing languidly uphill towards us,
the sun setting between her long legs.
She did not know to run from men with guns.

In the summer, my hair lightens to the color
of the Serengeti cape hare’s fur. My sister
has winged her catlike eyes with kohl,
and all of us adjusting our clothing,
tightening, buttoning, holding in.
All of this untaught. All of this
less grotesque than a girl’s body on its own.

The young policeman who brought her down
had stood face-to-face with a lion as well, the beast
trembling beneath the weight of this new, wide world
His hands confidant on the muzzle of the gun,
his own hair golden as kings in the light of a fading sun.

Afterwards, he tosses back
a pint with his friends at the dive bar
around the corner. When a small herd
of girls in short skirts walk by, he wolf-whistles
and grins. He nods towards a girl who absently tugs
at her hemline, looking over her shoulder.
To the men he says, Look at that—
legs like a fucking gazelle.