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Beauty and the Beast

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Beauty and the Beasts

for T.R. Hummer's "The Beating"

Everybody started chanting it like it was prayer.
Those stupid boys at recess
chasing after me like I was the one
that done it. Clifton — scratching
lies he knew stood no chance

of coming true, than he did of being human.
Why'd they do it — all that bawdy singing
till everybody heard it, and that Clifton, all wild and thick
who scared you just by smelling him, would sweat
while they circled around me, smug

with their new discovery, like some
pack of dogs tearing at raw meat,
until I started trembling, wishing God and the devil
would slash Clifton's fat hands for carving
such torment. It wasn't anger

that caught me. It was humiliation
that anyone that dumb would love me.
How could he? He'd been below me all his life,
so far, it was hard to see how he'd think I'd care,
ever. He was a beast whipping those boys.

He went down on them, pigs
all of them, and gave them a slap of the pain
I'd never forget how to use: how my beauty
can attract for all the wrong reasons
and sting, real sharp, when I want it

to; burn, like lemon spit, on broken skin.

Leigh Walton