

The Women

by Mel Goldberg

All the women I have loved
are gathered in a large white room
tall and thin, short and plump

the first smells like
cleansing rain in the spring

the second is tall and thin
I burned her picture and choked on the smoke

the third writes poetry
when I think of her
my spine reverberates
my body shakes
my arms ache like an old heart

the fourth wears a wedding ring
our love was lust
or maybe need for hamburgers
and potato salad
now we are snakes
coiling at each other

others flicker like an old movie

Each holds a sharp knife

the last looks at her hand holding the knife

and does not smile

“You don’t know what love is”
says the first

The second shakes her head
“How could you have loved them,”
black words sliding from her mouth
and falling to the floor

Their knives ooze hate
Their faces tight as fists

The first plunges her knife between my ribs
the pain becomes desire
until she pulls the bone from me with a snap

They hold me up as the second shouts
“You won’t need this,”
and removes an ear with single deft cut

My third comes forward
“You abandoned me
I would take your heart if you had one,”

The last watches “No, I can’t do it”

The married love grins
and puts her knife to my lips

The pain becomes a blunt needle

pushing through determined flesh
She cuts around my mouth
and I fall to the floor my blood pooling
slippery and dumb

My loves slide the pieces of me into their purses

The last one produces a large black garbage bag
puts my remaining bones and flesh into it,
and drags it behind her as she leaves

Mel Goldberg: After earning an advanced degree in literature, I taught literature and writing in California, Illinois, Arizona, and Cambridgeshire, England. For seven years, my artist wife and I lived in and traveled in a small motorhome throughout the US, Canada, and Mexico. We moved to Mexico where she paints and I write, and we are able to live on a small income. We have traveled to many countries and recently traveled to Cuba where we met with artists and writers.