

## DESCENT DOWN THE AVENUE OF DREAMS

---

*Victoria Armour-Hileman, award winner*

That first year I was always trying to save you.  
There was the beating they gave you  
before you came to live with us.  
Perfect miniature of a derelict,

careless in your bones, a stick and twig starveling,  
slumped in hideous baby postures,  
wrinkling your third eye—that blue bulge  
where you'd been hit. You were long,

thin, and colorful as a stained glass window.  
*Love starved* the doctor called it.  
*Babies know*, he said. Then the asthma.  
Throwing on robes at midnight, Mother

and I would rush you to the shower,  
one of us holding you up like a banner,  
the other turning on the steam  
until the room was filled with hot towels

of vapor, suffocating us, choking up  
the mirror. You kicked, your hands beating  
the air—frogs leaping at the sides  
of a glass cage. I held my breath with you

as long as I could. And when you were better  
I worried you with tenderness, kissing  
your baby cheeks, burrowing my face in the clean  
smell of your warm, powdery shirts. At eleven

must have been ridiculous, pushing away all  
hands, bossing anyone who would listen. I carted  
you around on one hip like the purses worn  
by high school girls. Ugly, I shoved my hair

behind my ears, stringy as wet dental floss.  
I chewed gum with tense, serious arrogance.  
I think I mixed us up, thought somehow I  
was the wizened starveling, suffocating,

wounded. Can you forgive me  
for loving only what I saw of myself  
in you? I know it is more terrible  
than that. Though sometimes even now

I startle out of sleep, and run down  
the hall, hearing that blue-faced silence  
only to remember we both moved out years ago.  
And when they told me what you had done

I followed you in my dreams, down the dark  
rich avenue of parked cars. And the hand  
was mine, raising the thick pipe, mine the first  
shattering breath, as the glass began to fly.