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Pressing On

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M.E. HOPE

Pressing on

My grandmother taught me to iron
how to bend and shuffle a blouse
around the ironing board's broad nose
how to insinuate the heat and steam
into a ruffled edge, hold down a pleat,
tame a collar. Lesson coveted at boot
camp as we set to perfect creases
and seams. The marks were complicated
enough, but once pressed in, a dungaree
shirt became a recruit's dream. Each
item of clothing had a required fold,
a set spot on the locker's shelf, a line
on the edge and the lip. Each folding
was origami-like in perfection and with
each practice, the time and the finished
garment, closer to a work of art. Those
few of us with the patience and practice
were given space, like old-world artisans
at some sacred skill and I laughed
as we practiced it, this woman's work,
this mundane, mindless craft.