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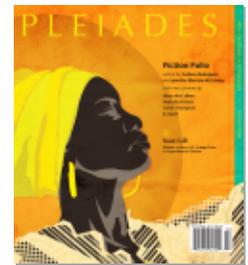
A Paraklausithyron

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A Paraklausithyron

is an old kind of poem
addressed to the door
of a house you want to get into,
where someone you are into
lives. Evening sees you return

to that door that stays shut,
and if it would only open wide enough
your song could change from lament
to love. Our campaign was long
the season I canvassed a city

and its hinterlands, ostensibly
for John Kerry. At the time it felt dire,
that nothing could be more
important, and I knocked on doors
from hefty moneyed houses

that gave me lemonade in clean tall glasses
to the most falling down
places. And by no means,
we were told, could we ever enter,
anywhere. About to ring

a bell on a dead-end street, I saw
through a picture window a naked man
asleep on his couch, and on top of him
a crested iguana the length of a golf club,
also sleeping. Sitting together

on the cool concrete of her front steps,
I wept with an old woman
who had just buried her son
and finished her story, *but yes but yes*
I'm voting for Kerry.

In a Mill Creek Valley housing project
I can't find now on a map,
no one on my Palm Pilot's list
of registered names
came to the door; everyone said

of everyone, *they don't live here
anymore*. Laundry hung from windows
to dry in the air that smelled
like a leak of something
nobody should breathe.

Standing in the dirt courtyard,
I looked up and could see, high
on the highest hill, my university,
where I'd taken in so many times
the almost panoramic view,

and I never knew.
Once a man who lived on a State Street
tried to get me inside,
behind his door with him.
But that's not how the poem goes.

Predicated on separation,
stubbornness and never-having,
the paraklausithyron,
and always ending with another plea.
I walked through an America about to vote

and it made me dizzy sometimes,
how I could smell some intricate history
at each threshold—bread baked,
a pet gerbil, a toxic cleaner or clingy cologne,
the rubber of a tricycle's handlebars

and the plastic of its streamers,
an ashtray between two tumblers
left behind the night before.
I was often sure someone was home
and would not come to me for anything.

