

ANNE-MARIE CUSAC

*Mathilde, Waiting*

The lamp bothers her most, as if he planned  
that she would land on her side, gazing up under the shade  
and the white light would eat into her eyes.

She thirsts, she recognizes the bulb  
as the thing that cracked in her brain  
for a long instant, long ago

before she fell just so on the nubby rug,  
her shoes at one edge  
her head at another.

When she feels inclined to give him credit,  
she remembers him snapping the rug  
from the front step as the neighbors walked  
staring and the rug bucked, cracked,

coughed, giving up its dust and crumbs.  
Then he came in and spread it out right here  
and smoothed the lumps so she could lie and wait

for the bulb to burn out. A husband  
is supposed to find his wife  
if she is lying on the floor, is supposed

to make the necessary calls,  
speak in a low tone, bring the water  
she would rather have than him, but the lamp stays lit

the window goes gold-red, blue-red, black,  
blue-red again. She adds the time in her head, the effort  
bores her, she's losing count, she's tired.

When she closes her eyes, she can see him on a deck,  
binoculars on his neck, behind a run-down house.  
The sun in the bay looks like a lightbulb.  
Today the sun is refusing to diffuse.

The sun is wrong. This will tell him to come home.  
Each time she makes this request, this  
command or, sometimes, plea,

her arm, far too long for a human limb,  
unfurls from the window and tickles his neck.  
It is lit, too, white with a filament  
that runs the entire length and stops in the fingers.