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Three Poems

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**Cropper Undergraduate Creative Writing Contest:
Poetry Submission (edited)**

by Gabriella Sghia-Hughes

The All-American Attic

Our family is a cracked attic, slapdash and drafty.
A breeze barrels through and we feel it, each only
in our joints. I am parallel to the beam of my brother.

My brother never beams. Sometimes he looks halfway
to self-satisfied, but then he opens his eyes and groans:
our family is a cracked attic, slapdash and drafty.

My mother disdains displays of affection. She blames
her mother. How many women precipitated the chill
in my joints? She hovers, polished shingles facing out.

My father is an idea. Through his lumber I see that
we should be solar panels and dug into the south side
of a hill instead of a cracked attic, slapdash and drafty.

When we invite a friend up the ladder, they compliment
our family's tree—until their radiant light throws into relief
our musty joints. Then they'll breathe carefully, suddenly

aware of our rotting, tenuous architecture. Carefully,
again, they recede. Their withdrawal hollows
our family's cracked attic once again. They do

not return because there are no renovations
or retrofits for this slapdash, undated model.
We cracked atop a home, drafting memories,
sharing a joint occupation, for a while.

Tramping Through the Woods Behind My House

age 7

I was Lewis and Clark a scientist
a wolf crooning to the pink autumn moon,
washed out in the bright sky grandiose trees
unappreciated outstanding I
was the world's greatest detective: the neighbor's
canoe filled with moldy maple leaves a
pristine, white skull iridescent dusty
black feathers a wily crow the fox's last
loose molars dangled from his jaw so light
a veterinarian I healed them
packed the holes in him with feathers took
him home fractured orbital foresaw his
collapse yellowed dust hidden beneath us
in the basement a shoebox a corner

age 21

I hike, now, in the small valleys. My house
cuts deep into the already cramped wild.
My holy skull long since tucked into a
detrital bed; I can't prove he was real.
Crows must have scavenged the carnivore's flesh.
Realism intrudes now, always. Even
in my unconscious. I dream of my dog,
dead a year, form faded, like his throat by
the end—irretrievable . I intend
to etch his paws into the gray matter
of my memory. He lopes up, gait perfect,
but I anticipate how I will fail
his shape. His bones too big, he overfills
my lap. I still stroke his too-large fox paws.

Unnaturally Selective Love

young me gave rare bear hugs like
I could transform the other person

into me, like I could absorb tiny,
discrete circles of their genome

if our membranes folded
together just right. says

a lot, friends say,
says priorities, says

disconnect, I say. says I
thought I was more cub

than kid. I would choke
my arms up around their ribs

and constrict
until one day

my dad said *too much.*
too strong. hurts.

but I was violent; I was
natural. A detritivore.

I scavenged my ancestors'
bodies so that I could live

to pass on the genes
that made me

love
so instinctually

I would kill.