

KATHERINE SMITH

Why I Am a Realist

The worst thing I ever did wasn't to leave a grown man
alone in his apartment in Paris in August or to escape

into winter's world while my mother slept
off the bottle of barbiturates, my sisters

huddled at her door with cups of tea, wanting to help,
while, thirteen, I galloped a grey horse across dazzling frost.

The worst thing I ever did happened in July, when ropes
of trumpet vine hung from scrub pine like lamps, and shade

showed the path to my daughter's best friend's house.
She was thirteen. It doesn't matter why I dragged her

back inside the house or why she hissed
"there's no such thing as permission anymore."

What matters is that for three years after
not a dawn rose when I didn't wake knowing

I was a person who could slap a child hard.
I'm watchful now. My daughter loves me. Still

she doesn't—and I wouldn't have her—forget
anymore than I'd have only the pink

of apple blossoms without the undertone
or the pale cream of bowls in a still life by Morandi.

My daughter knows me—not only as the brightness of morning—
as I knew my own parents—as the core of the shadow.