

LESLEY WHEELER

Rim Walkers

Someone trained the fur on the dying baby
rabbit into spirals. Its belly fuzz is stained
with darkening red. My children kneel in the grass,
puzzling over what to do. We drizzle
water into its mouth and it scrabbles to life,
lip fluttering like an infant's—it wants to nurse.
As we lift the handful into a shoebox, we startle
at hearing a high-pitched complaint and spot
two tiny incisors in the rose-brown cup
of its jaw. When it dies it seems to weigh much less,
emptied of desire. Its eye shocked wide.

This is the most dangerous corner in town,
she says. *My daughter goes to church with the chief*
of police, and he says so. Why, just last week
I crossed here, and a red pick-up truck, it flew
around the corner and clipped the tip
of my cane. The old woman caught on me as I walked
by, like a dandelion spore. Stuck,
like the chorus of a sad song, like melted gum.
I carry her on my back all day. Her hair
brushes my cheek as she whispers for hours about
rubber-tipped wobble-voiced old person things.

Both of them haunt the edges of the main
road, where the traffic is so loud you can hardly
hear them. You have to be small and light to live
on the rim. You have to focus on just one hunger.
A grassy stream of milk in the dark. A stranger
who can be shamed, briefly, into slowing down.