

Justin Bigos

Submerged

I watch my father on the couch
sleeping, his spine crested
like a tired wave. He's been up
for days, avoiding nightmares.

I search the opposite corners
of the room, glowing black and blue.
Crates of recyclables in plastic bags:
apple sauce jars, Smirnoff, ketchup

bottles, Jim Beam. In the second corner
crates of his ten-year subscription
to National Geographic. I flip through
photos of fossilized cave art, Sambia nose-

bleeding, the Great Barrier Reef.
He's talking in his sleep. I find
a special issue: the Blue Whale.
An insert falls into my hand — a vinyl

paper-thin recording of whale speech.
My father doesn't own a phonograph.
He's facing me now — one eye half-
open in the shadows.

I put my fingernail in a groove
on the record, spin it on the carpet.
I imagine the sound of whales,
massive rumblings submerged

in saltwater. I have no way
to gauge what they sound like —
air escaping the pinched lips
of a balloon, a car skidding six blocks

on bald tires. The rush of a police car
sheds color through the basement
curtains and I see his eyes are closed.
I turn back to the record and spin

it under my nail. I can hear my father
mumbling into the cushions
behind me, writhing and grabbing
for air, drowning.