

Tall Ships

they call them, thick-wristed dowagers
sailing down Commercial Street,
muumuus luffing in the bay breeze.

They come from all over, adam's apples
jutting, whiskers caked in thick foundation.
They stride in tweed skirts

and bagged hose, Peter Pan collars,
scarves knotted at wattled necks —
nothing like the tittering, slim-hipped

drag queens — no spike heels, no spandex.
The wives come too, sometimes the children —
everyone tight-lipped, careful

with pronouns. *This is who we are,*
the Tall Ships announce, slowly
fixing lipstick in tiny mirrors,

this is who we've always been.
They miss their mothers, Nancy says.
Maybe it's the lingerie, I say, but that's not right.

There's what we desire, and then
there's the truth — ankle turned in its scuffed
pump, wig like a worried spaniel, slightly askew.

And what if we become the thing we love?
What still, strange pool do we drown in,
dress-backs caught in our pantyhose?

On Monday, they'll step into
boxer shorts, brown wool suits. They'll kiss
their wives goodbye, drive their bodies off

to work — fluorescent hum, the phone's
insistent chirp. Just like the rest of us,
hunkered behind our desks

while the selves we carry inside
preen all day on café chairs, sipping Campari,
gazing out at the green and sequined bay.