

Absolution

At night, the winds rolled
off the Mississippi and caressed
magnolias blooming
by the bedroom window, ivy embracing
the screen.

To ignore marks left from her mother's skin-splitting blows,
she dreamed of being Scarlett O'Hara, twirling
in a billowed dress, flirting
with beaux and throwing saucy glances, forgetting
the harsh words of daylight.

Nighttime was her lover until she married. Branded
a wife, she traveled west to a land painted
with wildflowers and cattle. Here, with none but the wildlife to witness,
her teacher-husband unleashed
a storm of failure, tearing her shred-small.

She sought comfort
where she could – in God's book. She cooked
with visions of poison and cleaned
in pious belief. When she raised a hand against her own, leaving
welts of mother love, she calmly reasoned
way the blows in the name of Jesus.