Creature of Habit
Nathan Stables

Dream the creature and it might crawl out from a glass holder; the fluidity of line and shape but knowing that its creation was absolute and its self-destruction arranged long ago. And I come sometimes, anticipating that maybe the creature will flower a tail, grow taller as light absorbs into his frayed skin and shrink back when time calls him inward.

I know now that the mirror brings no promise of change. I challenge its forward stare and meet a creature, but not the one of my vision. I see the unrelenting scorn of the sun, pock-marked strips on pallid skin displaying a chameleon-like talent of masking the truth, my inherited impatience and resentment bubbling up. I peek ahead into a smile so manufactured only my mother could have done better, never willing to yield unhappiness lest it seem insincere. I look deeper past the blue pools of my eyes over-framed by inching black caterpillars to locate the real creature, whose face concedes truth that mine no longer can. It conceals a natural ease made cancerous from exposure to judgment, weighed down by the residue of the day caught in the fibers of my clothes.

I leave the glossy face behind in a half-stupor, undecidedly disappointed or motivated to lock the creature away in its crystallized reflection within the glass. But the resistance comes from within and oozes down and out the space between my toes, cementing my step. I look down at the gooey imprisonment and sigh, knowing how hard it is to change a creature of habit.