

# NUCLEAR FAMILY TRIPTYCH

PAIGE SULLIVAN

I.

Each night, Caleb's family prayed over dinner.  
Father at the head of the table, mother to the left,  
brothers across from each other, me tacked on.  
An effortless choreography, we reached for each other  
and cupped palms, hovered hands midair,  
Caleb giving mine a light squeeze before his mother  
passed around the leftovers, spooned jam onto a biscuit.

II.

During the babysitting gigs at the pristine home  
with an honest to god picket fence and gate,  
I would perch at the kitchen island with textbooks  
and my laptop, glancing at the monitor,  
busy with homework late into the night.  
In my memory, the handsome father stands  
across from me. Or he is leaning, on elbows.  
More important is his wife entering the room,  
looking at him, then at me, then back at him.

III.

My professors had collapsed into friends,  
permissible but still thrilling. The first time

they asked me to stay late, to have a beer,  
the bottle was cold and I peeled off the label.  
They moved to the mountains and invited me to visit,  
the pleasure of gossip, pasta, strong cocktails.  
When I arrived, he pulled hot sheets from the dryer,  
led me to the guest room. We each took a corner,  
guided the linen as it floated down to the mattress.