

The Genius and the Soup Kitchen

On opening day, no one showed up.
Same with the next. And the next.
And the next.

Finally, he unplugged the Open sign.
He waited for it to cool before bending
the letters, forming new words
with electric yarn.

You Will Find Everything Here
now glows in the window. At first,
only a few questions crawled
through the door. Soon, unfinished

sentences. Eventually, herds
of priests, atheists, whole families of
extinct animals.

Today, there is a four hour wait
just to stand inside. Starving,

they ask about winning
lottery numbers, lost family
recipes, the necessity of exercise.
Is there a God? Why doesn't he return

my phone calls? Where did I leave
my car keys? When a tree falls
in the forest, does it suffer?

He serves bowls of bubbling
Compliments. Slices of Financial Advice.
Entire legs of Answers, fresh cut
Answers, baked Answers served
with butter and garlic.

When they leave, he hears them
use words like full, content.

He has stopped sleeping at night.
He lies in bed and watches the hours
clock in and out of their shifts.

*I am a dumb doctor.
A Novocain prescription.
I am new shoes
on a dead horse.*

The Perm

The first time my mother stood up
to my father, she got her hair permed.
He had told her not to—said it was
a waste of my *hard-earned money*.

My father tells me this story while crying.
He is softer now, a treadless tire.
My mother came home from the salon,
and *I'll be damned, Sierra, if it didn't look
terrible. It killed me, I swear to God.*

This perm, the first mutter
in a soundless room, the swing of the bat
only to find the piñata is a real dog.

Now, thirty years later, I am a poet
and I am telling this story as if it were mine.
I am harvesting this splinter.
This embarrassing toothache.

I am dragging my father's temper out of storage
by the wrist. I am making my mother drive home
from the salon over and over and over.