

GRAHAM NICKSON

Sun in House, 2014
Watercolor on paper, 22 x 30 in



COURTESY THE ARTIST

ROBIN ESTRIN

Heel

I have always admired the gundog
for his agility, the way he tears across
the stubble field in pursuit of his master's kill.
I have loved his finesse, how he holds
the dead weight in his slack jaw like a lover
inert from a night of drinking. There is loyalty
in the way he passes her off to his man,
who stands by like a chill pimp.
And what self-control he has, the gundog,
with his contentment to salivate,
to come, to sit, to stay. He does not bite to kill.
Perhaps this is his nature; perhaps this is
an exemplary dog. You see where I am going:
There is a dog that comes for me in low light,
begging for scraps. When he takes me
in his mouth, I roll over; I come; I play dead.
Shock is not a survivable state, God no—
ask anything that has lived in the mouth of the dog:
the rabbit, the pheasant, the fox.
O meat and potatoes! this game of fetch,
this *I do for you what you can never do for me*—
it is no good. Here is the image I offer,
the showing & the telling: I, too, was taught
to love without teeth, to hold the kill
in my mouth and hum my ugly song.
Perhaps this makes him pathetic.
Perhaps this makes me a very good dog.

Robin Estrin's poem "Heel" is the winner of the George Hitchcock Memorial Poetry Prize. Estrin is a recent graduate of the University of California, Santa Cruz, where she studied literature, politics, and book arts. She is a recipient of the 2016 Chancellor's Award for her senior thesis, "Yours, Truly," and a finalist in the 2016 Bucknell Seminar for Younger Poets. This year, Estrin will serve as the volunteer coordinator for the Young Writers Program, a nonprofit that organizes creative writing projects in schools throughout Santa Cruz County.