

JACQUELINE BERGER

Beggar

What a waste when you were young not loving
but obsessing over imaginary, unavailable.
Not for you, the prelude of hands
brushing against each other passing sugar.
Nor chapter one, the unbuttoning,
shirts like spilled cream on the worn floor;
chapters two through five,
a fight, a change of scenery, a feast,
the cleanup left for morning
as the lovers retreat to the nest
at the top of the stairs
the summer they live in the old sea house.
Roommates fail to see the charm
in lobster shells and half-eaten chocolates,
soiled napkins like wilted peonies and the faint
sound of laughter leaking through the ceiling.
Not yours, the final chapter where the hero
bicycles through the winter landscape,
ash and bone, bare trees, a lone figure
on a path through the woods.
Your heart was a tin cup
rattling its single coin like a beggar
on the corner as the lovers passed,
one's hand tucked in the other's back pocket.
You could almost see under their shirts
the muscle of the heart swelling like dough
in the moist dark and pushing against
the cloth of its container.

Jacqueline Berger is the author of three award-winning books: *The Mythologies of Danger*, *Things That Burn*, and *The Gift That Arrives Broken*. In early 2018, her new collection, *The Day You Miss Your Exit*, will be published by Broadstone Books. Her poetry has been featured on Garrison Keillor's *Writer's Almanac*. Jacqueline lives in San Francisco with her husband.

URSULA O'FARRELL

Tempest Moon, 2009
Oil on linen, 48 x 48 in



COURTESY THE ARTIST