

## Jackleen Holton Hookway – Three Poems

### She Calls Late

and it takes her a moment  
to say anything. I'm afraid  
as I always am  
that something has happened.

But it's not *I have cancer* or  
*Your brother's been in an accident.*  
She says *I wouldn't want you*  
*not to have children*  
*just because I was a terrible mother.*

I'm about to tell her I don't want to  
have this conversation, not now.  
But there's a silence seeping

through the line; the stillness  
of her old house mingling with  
the empty murmur of my apartment.

*I'd hate for you to miss out on the joy,*  
she finally says. I catch sight  
of the alarm clock's green numbers  
afloat in the darkness.

And in spite of my anger  
at the intrusion, she's hooked  
me. This is the first I've heard  
of any joy.

So I listen as she talks  
about the two times they laid  
her children in her arms  
after labor,

then the way her life became  
a long strand of moments  
suspended on a delicate chain:  
me clinging to my blanket,

Donnie swimming through  
an underworld of sleep,  
his lips puckering like a fish.  
I glance at the clock again,  
tell her I have to go. It's late.  
I've got work tomorrow. I place

the phone back in its cradle,  
close my eyes, willing away  
the room's quiet hum,  
the glowing numbers.

### **Triple Truck Stop**

Granddad left Donnie and I alone in the truck  
to wait for Mom, who had been away  
all summer at school. Sitting in the hot cab,  
trying not to listen to the braying cows in the trailer,  
our anticipation began to melt into boredom  
with its familiar smell of desert dust  
and canned tobacco. When she finally stepped  
between the rolled-down window  
and the sun, her brown hair  
was rimmed with burning

light and relief. She hugged us fiercely,  
as if it hadn't been her choice to send us off  
to Grandma and Granddad's ranch.  
Then the three of us, our long-legged  
shadows holding hands, walked around  
the truck stop, looking for Granddad.  
Outside the diner after hamburgers and ice cream,

we met a smiling man who lifted  
us up into his shiny, black rig. We fiddled  
with the CB radio, pulled on the bellowing horn  
while he chatted with Mom  
until she called to us in her mad voice—  
the one we hadn't heard in months—  
to come down, then quickly led us  
away from the grinning trucker.

As the sun slid down the other side  
of the sky, we circled the grounds  
again. A sign on a little building  
caught my eye: The Candy Shop.  
Can we go in? I asked. Mom nodded,  
but behind the door, no candy,

only some ladies in their underwear.  
Mom said *Oops, we thought  
you'd have sweets*. Life was full  
of promises like that. We walked around  
a little longer until there was nothing  
left to do but go back to the truck  
and those cows who seemed to know  
where it was headed, and wait for Granddad.

## **The Distance**

Once nearly six feet tall, a beauty  
contestant, my mother's grown smaller  
since my last visit, now huddling  
her shoulders as she walks.

When she leaves my brother's  
house and we're slumped  
over our bottles, scanning

through the channels of nothing  
on TV, I tell him I can't believe  
how skinny she's gotten. He nods,

takes another drink. But he's  
the one who's been watching  
it happen. *And she's so pale,*

I say. I haven't been back  
in three years. I look  
at him again, my baby brother,  
the tiny pewter skulls boring  
into his earlobe and eyebrow,  
the steel-colored shoots

coming up through the brown  
in his goatee. I wonder if he's noticed  
the changes in me, the details  
I study in the mirror.

It's not a question of if. I know  
it's coming, the phone call.  
His low voice cutting through  
sleep, the news pulling me  
back over the distance. But I

don't want to think about that now. I flip  
through more channels, put down  
the remote and pick up

the bottle. He reaches  
into a drawer, takes out a glass  
pipe, unrolls a plastic bag. Later,

I'll recall this moment, as if  
looking down on the scene.  
In the blue living room, the TV  
on mute, silence blaring, smoke.

**Jackleen Holton Hookway's** poetry has appeared or is forthcoming in journals including *Bayou*, *Kestrel*, *North American Review*, *Rattle*, *Sanskrit*, *Talking River*, and the anthology *The Giant Book of Poetry*. In 2014, *Bellingham Review* awarded her the 49th Parallel Poetry Prize. Her chapbook *Devil Music* was published by Caernarvon Press. She lives in San Diego and works as an astrologer/life coach and a poet-teacher with California Poets in the Schools.