

LAPAROSCOPY, OR A HALF-BIRTH

poem by Gabriella Graceffo

At Pleasure Pier, two girls plunge
into the sea, the gulf swallowing
the pink-skinned little pills
of their bodies as I sand my calves,
watching the slash of polka-dot
tween bikinis disappear in gray water.
A little high on propofol, I explore
the arcade of myself, the paddles
and pinball lights and openings:
three keyholes a surgeon cut to reach
the cyst in my left ovary, a mouth
that traps sound like a billiard pocket,
that trapped the answer to *Want to keep it?*
as the nurse presented the clotted mass in plastic:
naked, with milk teeth and hair,
staring out like it wanted something.
Was it a birth, a child made only of myself?
I flip the answer over and over
in my hand like a beach stone,
never quite deciding which side
feels best to touch. The two girls
surface, squawking frigid delight,
and when they dive back into the water's
throat, I realize this is how loss can feel:
not the slow suck of stomach acid through a straw
with a cocktail umbrella someone placed
out of pity, but a blue afterimage
that bites the retina with its gums,
no teeth, not even dentures borrowed
from some other grief, just a wet reminder
of something suddenly gone.



Image: "El Camino de Esmeralda" by Danelle Rivas. "Laparoscopy, or a Half-Birth" was written by Gabriella Graceffo for *Rattle's* Ekphrastic Challenge, May 2022, and selected as the Editor's Choice.