

Cherry red

Elizabeth Gibson

“We watch for a very specific colour”. The silversmith
blowtorches the almost-ring. I assume this colour is white
or something slightly off-silver: blue, maybe turquoise.

“We call it cherry red,” she says, and I stare as silver
becomes ruby, translucent, a boiled sweet, shape-shifted
as drastically as from rhino to fox. Yes, states can change,

I think of water and steam, of boiling an egg, of burning.
I guess I assumed a precious metal would be unchangeable,
like how, past thirty, I have started to see myself as armored,

a grub become a beetle, my inner self all tucked in now,
no room left to melt or transform. “This colour means
the ring is hot enough for the solder to melt and fuse it.”

She removes the blowtorch and the ring glows pure white.
She drops it in a tub of acid – it looks like water – to clean.
I then repeat all of these stages with my own silver offcut.

When finished, my ring will slide onto my finger and stay,
as I travel, as I stare into the mirror in a Schiphol toilet
at my face, blood-red in a way I have never seen before.

I will learn that even within my beetle shell, I can reach
a point where heat overcomes me, and people, and noise.
I will call my mother for help, hurl cold water over myself.

As my mother predicts, I will live, my face paling again.

I will fly on to Denmark, walk in tree-dappled sunlight,
hear oystercatchers, see cherry-red dusks over the fjord.