

Kestrel

Amanda Hartzell

The Witch and Dead President Visit Rockport

They arrive at a pink and brick coastal town pummeled
by the Atlantic, too cold and brittle with lady slippers to swim.

The president has been dead long enough.
No one remembers his birthday or how he takes his coffee.

The witch shops for scrimshaws, ancient and ornate like her dreams.
She wants to hang one above her futon as if it might explain

why she cannot swim or wrap presents or why
she can't warm up no matter how she burns.

The dead president does a breaststroke at high tide.
He searches for a whale with valves large enough

to crush any man composed of small
catastrophes and keepsakes.

Tide in lungs he remembers being young eating diner
over-easies and dancing with his mother and drunk aunts.

When he is gone the witch wanders alone. She believes
the dead president knows a whale is just a place.

She believes that heaven boils blue with suns. She gets
serious and kills some sweetness. She finds a barn

on the pier. Inside are paintings of other barns.
She buys one with doors open to fields of snow.

Lying on her futon much later she notices in
the painting dark shapes moving behind trees.

Most likely they are animals or shapes
that believe they are animals.