

Gut

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is what I've always called mine. Belly is cute. Puppies
and babies have bellies. I have a gut. It is not my stomach,

hard pink fist of acid and wine; not my tummy,
which hasn't hurt since I was seven. This is not Jess

from New Girl pointing out the little pooch
where Nick keeps his extra cookies. Mine is a gut.

Bigger than ever now, but it's always been there,
as long as I can remember feeling aware

of my body, somewhere around fourth grade.
It's what I look at first in every picture taken of me,

it's what I hide with draped cardigans and pillows.
It's what is angry now, slashed with stretch marks.

Gut. Beer gut. Wine gut. Cheese gut. But do you really
think I'm talking about my gut? This is a poem

about my father and mother, the awful ways
they talked about her body, the cans of early '90s

Slim-Fast stacked in the cold garage so they wouldn't
take up room in the fridge—my mother's body

after two children already took up enough room,
the Slim-Fasts would need to live in the garage.

My mother bought a yellow sport Walkman,
a bicycle, sweatbands. They also took up room

in the garage. My father went for his daily run
and couldn't understand why she just couldn't—

wouldn't—lose the weight. How easy when everything
can be engineered. I imagine that as his feet fretted

out each mile, he tried to solve the problem of his fat
wife and getting-fat daughter. Why can't a woman

with her soft body, once such a source of pleasure,
keep her body just as soft but not more? Don't women

know how to work hard? Can't they exercise
some control over something, anything? His garage filling

with junk he didn't want, his wife ballooning to some
unwanted thing. He'd clean house, one day.

