

The Shepherd

After death, I'll snip.
Carry a heart-shaped ear home
in each pocket.
He's asleep on my lap,
a black silken ear between my fingers.
I imagine sewing them together,
a small change purse
I'll press to my mouth.
Have you ever loved something
so much you wanted to take it apart?
The dog needs to walk,
tugs me out of the house
into Pittsburgh concrete morning,
into wind, into catch-breath,
into screen door clap and wet cotton.
The dog with soft ears pads forward
unaware of the weight he's pulling.



Author of *Animal You'll Surely Become*, **Brittany Hailer** is a freelance reporter and educator based in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. She taught creative writing classes at the Allegheny County Jail and Sojourner House as part of Chatham's Words Without Walls program. Winner of several awards for her creative work, In 2017, she wrote a ten-part series for PublicSource -- *Voices Unlocked* -- exploring how the U.S. penal system has shaped identity and life of many Pittsburgh residents. The series also aired on local NPR news station 90.5 WESA. In 2018, she reported on the opioid crisis in South Western

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