

JENNIFER GIVHAN

The Polar Bear

for Baltimore

I'm just another asshole sitting behind a desk writing about this
—Facebook status update

What I'm asking is will watching The Discovery Channel with my young black boy instead of the news coverage of the riot funerals riot arrests riot nothing changes riots be enough to keep him from harm? We are on my bed crying for what we've done to the polar bears, the male we've bonded with on-screen whose search for seals on the melting ice has led him to an island of walruses & he is desperate, it is late-summer & he is starving & soon the freeze will drive all life back into hiding, so he goes for it, the dangerous hunt, the canine-sharp tusks & armored hides for shields, the fused weapon they create in mass, the whole island a system for the elephant-large walruses who, in fear, huddle together, who, in fear, fight back. This is not an analogy. The polar bear is hungry. The walruses fight back. A mother pushes her pup into the icy water, spears the hunter through the legs, the gut, his blood clotting his fur as he curls into the ice only feet away from the fray—where the walruses

have gathered again, sensing the threat has passed.
My boy's holding his stuffed animal, the white body
of the bear he loves, who will die tonight (who
has already died) & my boy asks me
is this real? What I'm asking is how long will we stay
walruses, he & I?—though I know, this is not an analogy.

Rattle, Poets Respond, 2015
Lascaux Review 2015 Poetry Prize Editors' Choice Winner