Dawn of Man

By Max Ritvo

After the cocoon I was in a human body
instead of a butterfly's. All along my back
there was great pain — I groped to my feet
where I felt wings behind me, trying
to tilt me back. They succeeded in doing so
after a day of exertion. I called that time,
overwhelmed with the ghosts of my wings, sleep.
My thoughts remained those of a caterpillar —

I took pleasure in climbing trees. I snuck food
into all my pains. My mouth produced language
which I attempted to spin over myself
and rip through happier and healthier.

I’d do this every few minutes. I’d think to myself
What made me such a failure?

It’s all a little touchingly pathetic. To live like this,
a grown creature telling ghost stories,

staring at pictures, paralyzed for hours.
And even over dinner or in bed —

still hearing the stories, seeing the pictures —
an undertow sucking me back into myself.

I’m told to set myself goals. But my mind
doesn’t work that way. I, instead, have wishes

for myself. Wishes aren’t afraid
to take on their own color and life —

like a boy who takes a razor from a high cabinet
puffs out his cheeks and strips them bloody.

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