

Early Elegy: Headmistress

By Claudia Emerson

The word itself: prim, retired, its artifact
her portrait above the fireplace, on her face
the boredom she abhorred, then perfected,
her hands held upward—their emptiness
a revision, cigarette and brandy snifter
painted, intolerably, out, to leave her this
lesser gesture: *What next?* or shrugged *Whatever*.
From the waist down she was never there.

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Born and raised in Chatham, Virginia, Claudia Emerson studied writing at the University of North Carolina, Greensboro. In 2008 she was appointed poet laureate of Virginia, a two-year role. Emerson has been poetry editor for the Greensboro Review and a contributing editor for Shenandoah. She has taught at Washington and Lee University, Randolph-Macon Women's College, and the University of Mary Washington. Emerson's poetry, steeped in the Southern Narrative tradition, bears the influences of Ellen Bryant Voigt, Betty Adcock, and William Faulkner.

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