

Elephant

Sandra Beasley

On the Route 7 strip,
next to the office supply store,
next to the pool supply store,
next to the Tower Records,
next to the T.J. Maxx,
the Ranger Surplus lurked

where I shopped only
at the edges: iron-on patches,
all-weather lighters,
vintage plate pin-ups,
never venturing into the groin
of camouflage and camping gear,

until I began buying weapons
including a mace, a chained flail,
several throwing stars, and the book
Contemporary Surveillance Techniques,
with its cover art showing a man
crouched in a stereo speaker,

all gifts for my father,
because what do you get the man
who has everything—and by *everything*
I mean a large-caliber shell casing
upright and decorative
in the living room, where you might

expect a potted ficus to be—
and these, too,
were the years he gave me
T-shirt after T-shirt, souvenirs
of every posting and deployment,
including the one that said

*Hard Rock Cafe Baghdad—
Closed—Kuwait, Now Reopening—*
T-shirts that fit poorly
over my new breasts, boxy,
unflattering, and so I shut them
away in drawers again

and again, each of us
trying to say to the other
I see you,
the way a blindfolded man
takes the tail into his hands, believing
from this he can see the elephant.