Susan Johnson received her MFA and PhD from the University of Massachusetts Amherst, where she currently teaches writing. Poems of hers have recently appeared in The Kerf, Hawaii Pacific Review, Freshwater, Pinyon, Oyez Review, and North American Review. She lives in South Hadley, Massachusetts.
In Pre-Columbian times, the world was flat and people fell off all the time. Discontinued species sought refuge on the steepest slopes. What you might call a dingle, but not in front of the kids. Nuns, cloistered in tight clusters, jogged alongside outlaws as they roped and rode their visions right to the edge. Are racing them still. It’s the stretchiest relationships that last. Tidying our messes, messing with tides, we leapt on anything that would take our lives for a spin before they spun out of control. Language like fresh cut grass on the tongue. There’s a switch on the side of the planet that flicks on and off whenever another concept, or container ship, explodes. The ocean a sky that can’t keep its stars straight. You don’t have to be a mermaid to struggle with your footing. Knowledge an uneven thing. What washes ashore after a late night storm is anyone’s quince pie. Some things are best left unexplained so there are foot prints to return to, to follow into the high meadow where lingers the last rogue balloon. We started as fish thinking we’d grow into turtles; as turtles we wanted to be birds; and as birds we weren’t satisfied until we were trees batting down clouds. What’s next? Rocks are sharp and our bones are old. One person’s benchmark is another’s wind jammer cruise. But that barque embarked eons ago. Last aboard, a dog unable to shed its fleas.
CARPET DREAMS

The chair wants some 
alone time but the man 
sinks only lower and lower.

He’s in for the night. 
What about me? says 
the chair. My legs are tired 
too and my arms need 
a stretch. Meanwhile 
the carpet dreams of pulling 
out from under them both. 
All these years I’ve been 
supporting you, it says. 

Meanwhile the floorboards, 
the foundation—and below 
your mother’s grave.