Self-Portrait as Chrysalis

Stevie Edwards

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For my first solo and ensemble competition, I played
"Chrysalis" by Gustave Langenus on the clarinet
and squawked my way into a red ribbon. Here I am
in my new blue dress drinking an iced coffee
hearing that old song in my bones. Yes,
a chrysalis is an overplayed image in poems,
but hear me out—I have spent twenty years in a cocoon
of alcohol, alcohol wrapping around all my youth's
slime and growth. I have spent twenty years
waiting to see what happens when I grow up and learn
to handle my liquor. It was a dark, dissolving place—
first I had to let go of my muscles, then my organs.
I had to liquefy everything but the most vital,
most life-supporting bits, digesting myself
from the inside. And now I am breaking through the dead,
rough skin that has protected me. Listen, I am all delicate
wings these days, so fragile as I soar.

Stevie Edwards is assistant professor of English at Clemson University and poetry editor of *The South Carolina Review*. She is the author of *The Weather Inside*, *Quiet Armor*, *Sadness Workshop*, *Humanly*, and *Good Grief*.