

American Academy of Poets Winner - Mark Hoffer

## Truffles

The first thing I see is the ribbon--  
Gold foil. It is coiled in a sort of  
Bunch above four bands  
Taut as valise straps on a flattened hatbox.  
The satiny wrapping

Shimmers its grain, ~~lin~~ to the redwood  
Lattice of multiple crosses--or the hair  
Of Grandma Collinge's Norwegian Jesus  
That sat on the dashboard  
On her car trip

To Mexico  
To see a healer for my mute uncle,  
Then eleven. The round box  
Went unseen before the porchlight lit a gift  
with no fingerprints. Stone cold, I take it.

I place it inside, where my icebox  
Hums, a hive of drugged bees,  
In a shrine of fluorescence, bone-colored ledges,  
Silent tiles, each with a pink  
Floral that glows from the center.

All hope, I open  
What's torn, peeling a sheen  
Off air  
Dark chocolates live on  
In their hundred small cups--

Tight white  
Paper scallops make fences. I lean in:  
Each curve a black promise,  
Rum on its breath.  
The stench

Knocks me out, the dead kissing me in it.  
Unflammable ash

Coats me invisibly,  
The nose and lips  
Open to a room of fur-turbaned women

Snow  
Gowned with cigarette holders  
And Afghans on leashes, Matisses  
Glittering by lit wicks of filled candelabra.  
The candies are still,

Exhaling extravagance.  
Are they scarabs, providing the low chant's  
Back-silence, or leeches  
That, even in pieces,  
Might attach down my throat and happily drain me?

They are blacker than seeds,  
Or beetles,  
And fatter, bulging with sweetness.  
If I ate one, I might think  
"Delicious"--and never wake from winter.