I
He had a beautiful body.
Slack and long and covered in black
It stretched straight up
Flooding the air with the sooted suit
And soil he gathered
In the back woods of Illinois,
Those days he walked barefoot four miles
To school.

And he was modest,
Only showing the high white flesh
over the dark beard of his presidency.

He was everything once,
And whole,
And his heart often laughed and resounded
So loud that many got earaches

(that time
after his cabinet voted No
on emancipation
he chuckled a bit, raising
his right long hand, saying “the ayes have it!”)

And his heart rested higher than most,
Feeling in the same plane over the earth
Where most minds match wits
Endlessly disputing the emancipation
Of all things.

II
I saw his face once in the dark
While walking under a clear moon.
A strange taste in the moonlight
Made my pale legs halt the half-limp walk.
My eyes followed the narrow light
Of the moon to its image
On a sleek Coal-black car,
And I peered through that blackness
Of the night
To a penny the size of a small ache,
It was that obscure.

The corpse couldn’t even rot in peace
Before the grave robbers came,
Dug it up
And shattered his bones, still full of marrow,
Beneath a heavy hammer of honor and praise,
And ground up calcium and cartilage with copper,
The cruelest of those precious ores.

Hollow worship
Was all it was,
A huge empty vessel voyaging among archipelagos,
Over shallow alginate oceans,
The way the finger moves across the green crust
Over Lincoln’s face of the penny.

III
I walked and learned
That Lincoln lost his aspect, lost that
Sympathetic stare,
When they cast his head in copper
And they took of half his face.

Naked and dismembered, he was
Tearless and in shame
While I fumbled in my pocket,
Yelling “Fuck the Nickels and Dimes!”
As fingers ran the maze of metal
Ridges for my keys.
And the feet moved two steps forward
Til I found another coin;
An old copper piece of Lincoln,
A small fragment of his grace.
The air formed voiceless whispers as
I held him in my hand—
They said that all the scattered pieces
Can be made whole once again.

Mark A Clements