

SHERYL LOEFFLER

## Shelvers

Decades and the shelf back fell away  
as I returned a book to a bookcase in my study,  
and you were there again, looking at me  
from the other side of a library shelf,

your large, brown, liquid eyes, in love.  
We were shelvers then, hired to put away  
the books that other students used,  
arranging them first by number

on a truck (a shelf that rolled on wheels).  
I shelved by size—the fattest first,  
clearing feet and inches from the truck,  
leaving the single sheets and pamphlets,

which took as long to shelve but made  
no great impression. Your large, brown,  
liquid eyes, in love. *No*, I said. *Not even for  
a coffee*. I didn't mean it cruelly, but it was.

The coast my too-young, shipwrecked marriage  
washed up on, a newfoundland of unforgiveness—  
never again to date a man. What do we owe  
to those who love us, those we don't love back?

*Leave some work for him*, they said.  
*You do it all. He doesn't do a thing—*  
when, in fact, you did. That inch of single sheets  
I left each day could take an hour.

One day, you didn't show. Sick? I asked.  
*Oh no*, they said. *We fired him. Didn't do enough.*  
My feeble tries to tell them. What do we owe to those  
we don't love back? I owed you more than that.