

Baritone Twelve

by Sara Backer

He's neither worst nor best, useful
for community choirs, but he yearns
for a solo. He constantly auditions,
believing in *try again*. Soprano Six owns
the star aria, Alto Eight gets a duet,
Tenor Eleven makes a trio. Baritone Twelve
gets *sorry*. One problem is that he'll bury tone
in his thick and curly beard. Another
is that he can't shave his beard, not now,
before the baby willow warblers fledge.
When they fly out – *one, two, three!* – he still
can't shave because a tiny shrew-mole nested
its black velvet body inside his warm long locks.
The shrew-mole, on field trips, chews tunnels
and hums strangely. Baritone Twelve combs shreds
of bark out of his beard. Willow warblers slice
the sky with aberrant vibrato.