

MALLOWS

Pamela Murray Winters

I grew up with a hollyhock, in the middle states,
or so I thought. It was lavender-pinkish,

with papery leaves. Its blooms grew
deeper at their centers. Showoffs, I thought, flowers

of more than one color. Now I see postvirginal's
a better word, as the pollen speckles the heart.

I know now
that what my mother called periwinkles
were a kind of violet, her bluebells and pinkleberries

small weeds. When I first saw a hibiscus, I doubted
my mother's nomenclature, who called herself

hillbilly, wallflower, homely—a word
that in England is an embrace.

My mother chose
Pamela, "a name for a rich, spoiled English girl."
How could she know I'd love a country she never saw?

But she could tell a hibiscus from a hollyhock,
one exotic, one clutching the porchpost, both mallows, dark at the heart.