

## I KILLED MY CHILDHOOD DOG

by leaving that empty Cheeze-it bag in the basement trashcan. My sister shares the blame: she left the door open. We called all over, found him too late, his snout stuffed in the plastic. His fluid dark body still soft and warm. Days before, a swallowed tampon swelled up his intestine. He almost died, so when he came home and flopped down on the carpet, I curled around him. I rested my hand on the pink patch of flesh where they'd sliced him open, and I thought

Thank God,

Thank God.

## FAMILY SECRETS

[ ] and [ ] never loved each other.

[ ] and [ ] loved each other, but they were never in love.

[ ] will never love [ ] the way she loved [ ].

[ ]'s sporadic absences were from mental, not physical illness.

When upset, [ ] retreats into long silences, locks the door, courts worry by hinting at suicide.

[ ] used to come home drunk and [ ] would lock him in the bathroom, let him stumble around until collapsing in the dark.

[ ] still grieves that two of his children refuse to speak to him, and still regrets refusing to speak with his parents before their deaths.

No one ever knew the evil, pure evil in [ ]'s heart.

[ ] fears death most of all.

[ ] is fine with dying as long as she won't die alone.

For my part, I confess  
all my years of silence and all I still won't say.

## CHRISTMAS EVE

The pastor's hand lay thick  
and heavy on my shoulder.  
His red face split to say:

*Your grandmother told us  
about your condition.  
We've been praying for you.*

I never imagined  
my grandma carrying my illness  
past her times with me –

I sensed a new vacancy  
within: the bottoming out  
of any hope I had left.

The choir's celebratory  
exaltations embarrassed me.  
The same pastor spoke

but I could not hear him.  
Only, as his mouth moved,  
an echo of his words to me,

slowed down: as low,  
opaque and mournful  
as a whale song.

## SLEEPAWAY CAMP

When the first tick appeared, tears  
in my eyes, I rushed to the nurse,  
whose long purple nails plucked  
the bulbous body from my sun-specked  
skin. Then the second, fifth, tenth—  
I stopped counting. Each night,  
this ritual of prying one redblack bead  
& another & another & another—  
casting each into the night.  
I returned home marked all over  
with angry little pinpricks, my first  
lesson (but I did not fear) in how  
this body belongs not to me.

SEEN WALKING ALONG THE STRAND

above the sand like a horizon of gold coins:

the pig-tailed girl who cries into her bike handles, *Dad, I'll never make it.* He replies

*I love you, just keep trying.* Then the frat-hatted t-shirt clad guitarist attempting

to serenade a glossy brown-haired sunbather who I first mistook

in her stillness for an exquisite glittering corpse. Then the man

who whoops and hollers—  
I jolt at the sound, thinking

he's calling me, but when I turn  
I see him wobbly

on his e-bike, just learning  
to press the gas, his yelps

of joy striking the air.