

i learned all these things about heat

by Rucker Manley

in the old house i would scoop up
the green tree frogs on the door in my genie cocoa cup
and teeter them in cold water over the bathtub
lowering them by micrometers into the hot water

they get a little white stripe down the side as they die
it took me ten or twelve before I realized
they were not sleeping, not lost in haze
they had been boiled into a soapy death so deceptive

at daycare we sold granite crystals and twigs by inches
little caterpillars were nice but a cocoon was a prize.
just like cotton they leak yellow when you squish them
in your fists; caterpillars bleed brown on hot metal slides

i must tell you that if you have never lost anyone
death means nothing; i hope this is true, because this is
the only excuse I have left

it felt like i had lost a toy; until zachary's ma
died of firsthand cancer from secondhand smoke;
nothing felt like a toy after i saw her body that night
liz, in that bed

in that living room

she did not have a white line

thirty-four years old, she was

choking down godbreath

dad would buy me all the bbs I could muster
knowing that I would shoot them wild
at sparrows in the yard until I did hit one
and fell to my knees weeping; this was after liz died

why did it take three birds for me to stop
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they too choked godbreath; I can barely believe it now
last year i pull a robin from my car grill and felt that loss