

## WHAT DIES, WHAT IS BURIED

by Ashley Crout

1

They held her open  
to look. Her stomach so  
tight full, the watery tissue  
had begun to tear

like the split skin of a fish,  
the diluted blood blooming  
into the body's salt sea,  
opening and collapsing

in darkness, a soundless mouth.

2

Soon she'd forgotten hunger.  
There was no room left for food.

The nurses liked to assure us  
she wanted for nothing.

Still she clutched at our clothes  
smelling the world on them.

She watched the door behind us  
for someone who never arrived.

3

My grandfather bragged  
to his Sunday School class  
about the power of prayer.

They had asked for the cancer  
not to kill her.  
And really it didn't.

She starved to death.

4

Once she said to me.  
*Some things cancel each other out.*

Maybe we were eating, and she meant

the salty and the sweet,  
chocolate and Coca Cola.  
(stanza break)

Maybe we were watching the window –  
some brute uncle punish his child  
without reason but the need  
to be more powerful than something.

Maybe she was taking pleasure  
In the unspeakable wish

that this father would one day  
be the weaker, the smaller, the sufferer,  
and the child would win by outliving him.

5

I told the minister there couldn't be  
both a hell and a loving God.

And he said, "I believe  
in the loving God."

I said, "I believe in the hell."

6

Her lacquered casket listened  
at the pulpit's base.  
A Protestant death placed her there  
in the posture of a supplicant.  
The minister talking over her

said we should be proud  
she never doubted her faith,  
said she told him she had  
heard the voice of God  
and answered a long time ago.

And it was so lonely,  
being the only one who knew  
God can't talk.