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Only

O love, this happened or it did not.
In a room with green walls

my son was born. The cord was torn
too soon, so they cut off

his head to save his heart. He
lived for a long time.

For a long time there was no breath or cry.
When finally he spoke,

he spoke the wide, whorled leaves of corn.
He spoke the crickets

in clusters beneath the sheaves, he sang
the soil in. He sang the wind

in the dune and hush of ebb tide. Some say
he died. Some say he died.
Autism

Brave new mother, she refused to cast salt
over her left shoulder
and guided her son’s first steps under ladders,
laughing at their broken selves
in the shards of a dropped mirror.
Then, science and myth
were fictions they could ignore.

Now she opens the door to his room
to consider his things:
frayed parts of a motherboard,
a chipped prism. A cast-iron lock rusted shut,
a Botts’ dot burnished
like scrimshaw. Flint flakes, negative space
of an arrowhead’s edge.

In a less amber time still illiterate
in entrails, stirred ash, and bones
of small birds, she’d have tipped it all
into the trash. But she’s seen these things aligned
to make a jeweled matrix, heard them
sung to under the modem’s hum.
A mother, like any seer,
wakes the dark corridor of future alone,
and fear is the lamp and the book
that teaches respect for the family totem.
Perseids

When the real star died and fell, I knew the others for tricks, trompe l'oeil on insides of eyelids. But it was no trick when that star larger than sky fell out of my sky,

shock of arc-then-black. My son has chest pains again. I thought we were past this. When he was a child, it was easy to hold his hand all night so he wouldn’t die—

trace toxins in cereal, the new mole on his left little toe—I sang him back to sleep and the next day he was off again, climbing branches I couldn’t reach

or hunching all day over a fixed lens, knotting a fish line fine as an eyelash. He collects horseshoe-crab trash, knowing and naming each slender spire;

once I broke one and hid the pieces, but he missed it later, back to croon to his darlings, constellated in precise patterns in the sky of his bedroom floor.

He’s tall now, with a beard. The astral map is in pieces, just as real stars come unmoored and fall into flaming comets. Power fails,

EKGs skip and stutter, MRIs hum, then blink off. Boys he knew in school come home from Iraq without legs. He trolls the internet for side effects

of medicine taken to decrease the world’s discomfort with him. “Rarely fatal” doesn’t mean never, and what logic doesn’t whet each day’s edge

with fear? I could die, I might die, we all die. I’ll die. Maybe tonight, alone in his sleep. Don’t get mad, Mom. We’ve done all the tests twice,
but being alive means proving a negative. So how can we go on believing each day won’t be the one that flames out? When he walks in his sleep,

his eyes are open and dark night-terror pools. Shh, now he’s dropping off, worry lines etching his forehead, shape of his mouth sucked into the neck

of his T-shirt. Overhead, stars arc across the dark sky making small curved rips, and the light leaks out.
the unexploded ordnance bin

our son found the hollow shell
snub-nosed & finned
& looking like an Acme cartoon bomb
where we raked for clams
he wanted to keep it
& we wanted to let him

even the old oysterman wanted
to let him but we'd read about
the shell found & kept
for three weeks by a boy
in Oregon before the powder
dried & it went off

we took a few minutes
to snap photos of our son,
an ordinary boy then,
putting the shell under his sister's pillow
& pretending to launch it
at all the foods that made him gag

at the police station
the desk sergeant crooked
a thumb towards the dune
with its big metal bin & warning sign
once a month he said we set them off
& it really lights the place up

it's too small to be seen
the gene causing autism but I imagine it
anyway with snub nose & fins
& powder waiting to dry first words
blown off & away like the fingers
of that Oregon boy
whose mom's grief I used to feel safe from
who let her son keep his bomb
in ignorance or faith strong as
my own caution that led in the end
to the same spectacular
dismemberment of the future

& I wonder what it would look like
the bin for safe disposal of genes
that can ruin children
& I think maybe it's my own body
or rather the body
without children or rather the body

that's lucky or belonging
to someone still living
in ignorance & improbable faith
or maybe the bin
is the world when to be human
was all promise & radiance

unwinding dawn mudflats
into long wide shining ribbons
pink as a new baby's gums
& elsewhere a family
in a warm illuminated room
is eating steamed clams

or just any ordinary dinner
as if it weren't going to blow all to hell
any second all those bright dreams
lit up like tracer fire
over the dark dunes like the Perseids
only not at all like the Perseids
Everything Golden Is Spilled

You were born and your hour was silver,
new moonlight strewn

on dark ground. Pearls, seeds, wide banks
of clouds, your bright hair,

your damp, sleeping lap-weight, scalp’s
yolky chuff, tug at the nipple,

the universe contracted to suck and glow;
grain, drops of rain,

dreams for a time ripening and bending
wheat weighted with seed.

When did the season turn? Now drained
down, gone—we are

still in it, but the world has grown old,
and I want that bud

of boy back, packed with what might
yet bloom, each spiraled sepal

still sealed, and nothing, nothing revealed.
rapture/rupture

watching the wheel chair make
its long slow arc     the child's face slack
with what could be read

as rapture     a mother might well
thank God for the intact body of her own son
& also for the tiny stars of wood violets

the sun's rays shot through a cloud
a finch's sentence scribbled over & over
the wide expanse of a fallow field

needle in a haystack times ten
the chance my son would get this gene
my hand the only hand

he's held in two decades
a bitterness     yes     but I'm grateful for fire
and years     & the uses of gauze

for sparing your eyes     & my eyes
from your eyes     & that a wound     when
it's cauterized     seeps less