

CHALK LINES

Excavator a rough god climbs,
falters, and the rafters lose
their resolve. An erasure,
a fresh vault—

the nursery's ruined wallpaper,
its judgmental ponies cold
and snorting in the hollowed
shell of the cellar.

Childhood unlearns order:
unruly lick of stairs, fractured
cinderblock jaw. Childhood
slouching in the hall light.

Now I could swallow
the mess, could lob
a smooth stone through
the shining kitchen window.

Now the jaundiced sign upriver:
best deals on Icehouse 30-packs
in town; now the excavator
tarnished on the lawn.

I remember the garden
hemmed in railroad ties,
the nail stomped into
my tender heel—

each year shakes the scar
loose; each year lightens
the bruise.

I PROMISED NOT TO TALK ABOUT THE DEAD DOG

but the Dollar General
is Reno in the bottomlands,

half-dead neons buzzing
in the broom sedge;

it's a fresh crop of dropouts
in the back, soggy cigarette

hand-rolled into a hi-vis cuff
and it can hand you a shovel,

can send you downstream
to the river's ragged mouth.

You dream the dog bird bone
in soft towel buried shin-deep

at the foot of the pin oak;
you dream yourself wilted,

the tire swing spinning emetic
on its rusted chains.