

## **What She Left**

BY JACOB BUTLETT

She emerges from a river in a two-piece swimsuit, studded with slivers of sun.  
Her teenage body commands the shore,  
her wavy hair hovering above her shoulders  
as though to flee the photograph  
like smoke in a burning house.

Her smile used to sing in the hearts of all  
the boys in town, the hymn of her lips  
glistening in her Sunday pew. In church,  
she looks into the camera with a half-smile,  
shy, wayward, like a runaway peering  
into your soul, as though to find  
a home in the lights behind your eyes.  
Later, she loses her smile forever.

In the final photograph, see how she  
sprawls beside daffodils, how she  
looks blankly at the gray sky, the camera  
light like bleach in the edges of her eyes,  
in the tips of her wind-whipped hair.  
Her father kneels next to her, his callused  
hands looming by her bare back like brands.

She never told me what he'd done,  
not even as she lay dying in hospice  
many years later.

This is all I have of hers, this slim photo  
album. I look across my lawn as though  
I might see her music in the trees,  
her smile in the sky. I hold the album  
against my chest like a child, hoping  
to fall into the final photograph  
so that I may touch her unseen weeping.