

WEIGHT TRAINING

Twenty degrees—a hearse slims
through the blue-dim snow. At the gravesite
the fourteen-year-old waits

to carry his great-grandmother's casket.
He is afraid of his hands slipping
in the cold, afraid the ski gloves

his aunt offers will worsen
his grip. Women are supposed to live
longer but they do not in his family. Someday

his mother will die and he will have to choose
her casket, his own heart hurtling
toward its final career as a broken stone.

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Across the pastured marble
the hearse treads snow, more quiet
than silence. The boy's face is a field

blown clear of its usual exile
and derision. He adjusts the black
wool sweater purchased for the occasion, the tie

in its frowning collar, resists
the urge to pump his knees up and down
for warmth. This year he has grown

three inches, has learned the weight
of a rival team's skinny tackle, of deer carcasses
trussed with webbing, of early morning

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grain sacks for the family cow. But these
are the wrong kinds of strength for now
and he knows it. The boy tries

for the mute resolve of rafters. He considers
the structure of his mother's hair holding
steady against winter wind. The hearse stops

and subtracts its engine. He needs
the angle of her face, her jawline,
where sorrow is refracted.

Now? he asks, and pulls on the gloves.