

## Bryanna Licciardi

### River Bed

In my dream, I am floating down this river,  
tasting for salt, the mist,  
searching for an ocean, but it never comes.  
The currents stay steady and slow,  
the light is dull and I cannot see  
where to get off.

Last year my dog gets off  
his leash, and drowns in the river  
at the bottom of the hill. I see  
my dad disappear in the mist  
and I watch him walk back slow,  
empty-handed and tells me to come

here. Then my mom comes  
around the corner, wiping her hands off  
with a kitchen towel. She slows  
down when she sees his face. *The river...*  
he said. All three of us stared into the mist  
and we must have seen

something. We must have seen  
something we didn't like. When my dog doesn't come  
home, I don't ask anything. I missed him,  
but didn't see a word. Then I dream myself gone, off  
this street, down the current of this river  
and I'm looking down, watching it slowly.

Today I am learning how to swim, but I'm slow,  
slower than the other kids. I see  
them being stronger and better, I see that river  
and it makes me wonder how come  
Some things die and some things are better off.  
Suddenly I am screaming. Mister

Hendricks, my swim coach, is yanking me out of the mist  
and he holds me until my breath slows  
down and I am calm again. He pushes off  
the damp hair stuck to my head. I see  
his deep concern. When my mom comes  
to get me, I'm too embarrassed to talk about the river.

I am off in the mist.  
And I heard the river, its slow,  
Slow grinding (I can see it) against the bones, and then it comes.

## Father's Garden

I determine that God is addiction,  
an immense façade. Sunday choir cries out

his name like a drug, and it all makes sense.  
When Mom fences together a garden,

I try to get into it. The flowers  
bloom, powerful, at ease, I pray for them.

We find rabbits in our backyard, and  
go to The Garden Center for dried blood.

Sprinkling the powder around our plants,  
I ask if it is real blood in our bag.

He shakes his head, but not to me I think.  
*Death is redundant, don't you see?* he says.

Later we would learn how to plant gardens  
on his shoulders, forbidden to hurt for.

When I am growing old, I plan to walk  
with a cane, raking into deep, dark soil.

## Happy Endings

I am a 22 year old virgin sex  
addict. I think about not having it, and not—  
having it,  
and doing it, and splitting it. I need  
to not have it, lusting after  
fear. Piecing apart the fuck from I  
love, intercourse, lust,  
My id from your ego. Sexy, primitive  
history. It's the beginning and  
The best way to end things.

My sex  
has a spine.  
So says my first girlfriend.  
It's empty, provoking.  
Picture  
a countryside brothel, rocking,  
Her mouth wet in the young man's ear,  
*What are we afraid of?*