

Accident

They tell the son, who tells his friends
at school, that the father's death was
an accident, that the rifle went off
while he was cleaning it. I'm not sure
why he couldn't wait. We understand
the ones who decide to leave us in February,
even as late as March. Snows swell.
Sun disappears. Hunting season ends.
With two deer in the freezer any family
can survive. I know sometimes
it feels like you've come to the end
of something. Sometimes you just want
to sit down beneath a hemlock and never go
back. But this late in the year, when plum
trees have opened their blossoms?
Yesterday it was so warm we slept
with the windows open. Smell of forsythia
right there in the room. I swear
you could hear the last few flowers open,
Silk petals come undone, a soft sound
like a pad sliding through a gun's barrel,
white cloth soaked in bore cleaner,
removing the lead, the copper, the carbon
that fouls everything. My son knows
you don't die cleaning your rifle:
the chamber's always open.
I told him to nod his head anyway
when his friend tells the story,
to say *yes* as many times as it takes,
to never forget the smell of smoke
and concrete, the little bit of light
one bulb gives off in a basement
with no windows.

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Broadside

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