

Decoration Day

by James B. Goode

In short shadows,
 of the graveyard in the hollow,
 we avoid stepping on the graves,
 picking our way down the hill
 toward the sound of
 a solitary woodpecker
 tapping a hollow tree—
 tombstones lean,
 digging their feet stubbornly
 into the black loam
 as if to say,
 “I’m not going anywhere until judgment day.”
 Daddy stops in the shuddering Johnson grass,
 touching a lichen covered lamb
 lying curled atop a granite stone,
 his thinning, silver hair
 cast down among the age spots
 On his wrinkled forehead;
 he sets his palm upon the hoe,
 hip thrown out-of-joint,
 sweat dripping
 onto his gray, uniform work shirt
 Here lies
 his little brother,
 the musty language of our past,
 who fell into boiling water at a hog killing
 Seventy years ago
 he tenderly rakes his grave,
 careful to pick up rocks and clods
 and tells the story again
 about these bones,
 the ones we hold on to
 deep within our bones