**A Genealogy of Need**

Andrew Beckner

My papaw, James Beckner, born

in some dark holler with dirt

under his fingernails, swaddled

in the synonyms for need.

I’m trying to understand

need, needs, needing, as a weakness,

as a bare copper wire.

An illiterate alchemist, he cast

molten metal all day, collected scrap

all night—broken radios, bald tires, busted

engines, five decades of nuts and bolts

rusting in mason jars on the sill.

He’d tell me, you need new shoes

like a hog needs a sidesaddle, or you

need a new jacket like you need a hole

in your head, or need in one hand,

shit in the other, and see which fills

faster, but I can’t negotiate with hunger

when the refrigerator is empty, Papaw,

you died and your brother told me

a story about you and another man’s wife

and that man’s switchblade. So you

must’ve had it too, bad teeth and

needs beyond reason.