**The past is a doorway that pulses**

Dagne Forrest

with the muscle of a well-oiled heart,

the roof and walls around it etched

in constellations and glyphs, the secrets

to a future that knew no other way

to share its plans for us.

You’d think it was easy to enter,

its portal lit like a welcome fire,

but it’s never so simple.

On a night when sleep eluded me,

I sat by the woodstove, its embers low

when my son joined me.

Nodding toward the kitchen,

he said he missed his childhood,

getting up early to make breakfast

and schooling from home.

*What was I*, he said – *11, 10* –

*no 9*, I said, *you were 9.*

I recall those days, making French toast

(of course: *pain perdu* is lost bread)

as he painted a cardboard Roman villa,

the uneven wash of brown and grey

across roof and walls, and the spring

morning he perched at the back window

to paint the apple tree in full bloom.

The white cloud of petals emerged

in the negative space between

the thick dark lines of the branches

and the blue wash of the sky

on the blank white canvas.

How did he know to render

something real through omission?

Living in the same place

immersed in many of the same things,

you’d think it would be easy

to find our former selves

and slip into those moments,

but we can’t just chant the days

of the week backwards and inhabit

a Thursday morning ten years back.

The apple tree still stands, but no longer flowers.

A recent windstorm severed a limb

that once reached for the house.

Now it lies on the ground, still in leaf:

we haven’t the heart to make firewood of it.