**The Walnut Grove**

Kiana McCrackin

I hold her hand and we wander through our trees, fingers running over bark, assuring them, assuring us. We sit in their shade, hide from the summer, wish for the fall, wish for letting go. But letting go has never been my thing.

I think of all that the trees have given me. My roots, the willingness to stay home when my heart feels like a bird. Anchors for lines with laundry, tiny dresses, diapers sunning. Shade for tea parties and for nursing; for giving life from my life.

My trees will be gone. A forest fallen did not fall, a forest fallen was cut. Do my trees know what is coming? The men who will throw their limbs into machines that will cut them, compress them, until they are wood but not the same. Have they sent the message between them? Have they wished there was a way they could run? Do their hearts feel like a flock of birds?

It’s the trees or the house. He tells me.

Then take the damn house. I tell him.

But I concede. I agree to let them have my Walnut Grove. I sell the soul of our land to keep the body of it.

I come home from the grocery store, milk and strawberries already staining her lips.

They are gone.

I fall to my knees.

Cry out to the sky.

Watch as the songbirds startle, fly up into the air, looking for a branch.