**The Daughter I’ll Never Have**

Melissa Perri Smith

Is the splitting pain worth the bright light? Is my daughter

inside me right now, blooming in the womb, wondering

when the world will expand around her, or her around it?

I crack an egg on the counter & watch the yolk run. I chase

after it, after the streaming light of day saturated against the

bluest sky, but it’s faster than I can manage, & I’ve lost it.

I hold her against my breastbone. She suckles & spits up

her food, & I wake next to my college boyfriend, miles from

where I fell asleep, in a wedding dress that my mother hand-

stitched for me, bulging with the bump of her granddaughter.

I wake again, & we fuck, & there’s nothing inside me, & nothing

that can grow. We sweat & moan & capitulate about a future

where we can afford a house of our own, where our bed frame

won’t make earthquakes, where a child sleeps down the hall with

a name we’ve picked together.

*I want to know my child, or who they could be*, but I am afraid of

everything that could go wrong, of the world we’ve built or

destroyed for them, of my broken brain and the half that will

go to them.

My daughter nestles in my womb and sleeps a bit longer. I don’t

wake her. I wouldn’t dare.