Elemental
Graham Hillard

Summer days, the neighbor boys would share our acres, bring baseball gloves, tick spray, curse words intricate as gears turning. Landless, they loved our fields, prized especially the hours after rain, when all of us could scoop handfuls of earth newly silkened, pull worms, still writhing, from sodden clumps. I remember what it was not to understand how something elemental—so obvious, so owed—could give such pleasure, as any child might who had never known its absence. How even then they must have sensed a yielding, dirt creeping into their bones like marrow, first portent of a distant, welcome shattering.
Oil Painting, Artists’ Colony
Graham Hillard

We hardly noticed it at first, the winter landscape
so pale it seemed a portion of the wall, an interruption

only by means of the thin lip of its canvas.
Frameless, solitary, fixed at awkward height,

it skirted easy study, nearly brushed the crown
molding with which handyman, decorator

once thought to improve the room. Its scene,
when one looked, was earthbound, homely: tidy field

particular with ice, raven’s view. Across its length,
a darker spine of snow cleaved the earth’s surface,

rigid vein or road, white chastened by shadow
as rot corrupts an onion’s tunic, clouds prim layers

delicate as frost. And what caught our eyes at last?
Only an orchid, rootless, impossible, clinging to life

at meadow’s edge, its face a child’s face red with cold,
emblem of nothing save its own, inevitable vanishing.
Genealogy
Graham Hillard

You bloomed in insect season, skin-sealed, limbs slight as the wings of the cicadas that plagued us through early summer, droned endless Our Fathers outside steamy windows and surrendered their bodies to the flat, cracked expanse of the driveway. Night phlox, you opened in darkness: amniotic sky moonless and still as the unstrirred air of the house where we waited, flesh gathering dew, joy throbbing in our guts, for you.

Mute crescendo, you swelled and summoned yourself into being—bundle of rag and cord, hard lump. When you arrived, the doctors told us that, because your eggs were already in place, not only our daughter but our grandchildren had been born. Tonight we’ll ponder this genealogy: its generations as numerous as the corpses I’ll sweep from the sidewalk in the last moments before sunset.