

## **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 unstirred 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.