

Slipping the Collar

I had a dog but for a single day, one single night
before he slipped his collar and ran away, to where

and why I could not guess. I was nine and the world
fell through my fingers like salvation for the poor

for the helpless for bastards and fuck-ups for lost
little puppies who escaped their enclosures. My dog

was a present from another of my mother's husbands
recovering from long years of cruelty. Two months in

repenting for sins that still etched the back of my skin.
You could not sketch an inch of my soul that did not

draw some minor flinch, yet here he was repenting, yelling
out for this lost boy's dog to come home. A month passed

us by, dying trees began to reject their leaves, every
hiding place dug up but never even a bone found.

A month had come and gone and I woke to the violence of my step-father's steel-toed boots clunking at the base of my bed, shouting for me to get up, to feast my eyes on happy days to come, he began in earnest to drag me down a spiraling flight of stairs, out the door towards the lit porch where I found my dog. His head impaled, blood dripping from the tendons sticking from his neck, a single eye drooping from the socket the canine's canines broken or missing, his tongue dangling from an unhinged jaw. I was nine years old and already I was dining on my step-father's sins that eroded his away with the death of innocence and the long lasting artwork that crisscrossed my flesh, as the world began to dim his deep voice whispered in my ear, "aren't ya glad I found him, boy?" That night I slept on the ground beneath my dog, his collar around my throat

so I would know my place.