

CHELSEA DINGMAN

Cloud to Ground

Scientists can't agree on how a cloud
receives the charge that creates

lightning. I hear this & it reminds me
of thick rain, a sound like every god

I've prayed for, firing a gun
over our heads. Then, shrubs burning in the yard,

even after my husband turned the hose on
them. My son, screaming as if someone

had put the gun to his chin. Even explaining
how sound originates, not in the strike,

but in the cloud, could not stop
his flailing. In truth, when lightning strikes,

I now picture a gun. Like the one that killed
my neighbor when she got up the nerve

to leave. Like the one that killed two kids
a few neighbourhoods away, after a fight

with their mother. Like the one my stepfather
taught me to shoot, after getting drunk all night

& fighting with my mother. We heard them
fight & have sex & fight again

when it was over. I woke that night
& every night for years, running

every faucet. I wrote about snow
because the sky was starsick

the night my father died in a storm, snow
blowing the sky wide open. But there's no lightning

in a blizzard. No need to fear what science can't
explain. It snowed until there were no roads.

Until the sky swallowed all colour. Maybe
this new sky is what I wished for

my son. A sky other than white. A sky
with teeth, rather than a sheet over our faces

as we sleep. *Why don't I let him see snow,*
my son wants to know. It isn't about heat

or beaches. Florida, laid out like a sunning seal.
Or with wanting a child to hang from my neck

as lightning cobalts the sky. It's about the months
of calm, when the cicadas are the smallest

sound beyond the back porch. The months
between spells. It's how I saved myself

for him. Long nights when my husband & I talk
low in another room, the air conditioner

humming. Every bit of green outside, filled
with moving bodies I can't name. I remember

snow at the park. Walking home after dark.
My mother's eyes, raw & red. It didn't matter

the man. The widow, the wife. Everything ends
the same way. I can't explain to my son why

I can't go back. I've heard lightning explained
as the work of gods. Unlike snow, disappearing

in the sun, as it did when I left. Sometimes,
I imagine a body, after the thaw. Blue & stalled.

Sometimes, all I have to imagine is the sky
after sound enters. For my son, this is a city

that will have to be left. Every clamor
of cloud. Every gale, flailing the ground.