

C(h)ord

My voice box is my father in homeroom at thirteen: muted. Minus
two words: *Thank you*—the only in English he knew. Like

the switch got flipped to Spanish and I am sifting my memory for
shadows folded into syllables that ghost my throat.

My father's happenstance gratitude and lonely adolescence
now haunt my larynx. My throat is a Catholic school

hallway crowded with scar tissue and silence. Every thing becomes
my music-less throat: the labyrinth of concrete above me,

cracked plates stacked on the kitchenette's heaving chest, an unplanned
window in the hem of my love's plaid skirt, spittle

of ice through the haze of dusk in late December. I try to make
friends with the silence. Hold its endless weight, tell myself

it is another kind of song. And this, after a life spent filling
its bottomless silo with noise: each time we moved and

I had no one to call or share my boredom with, I would invite
invented friends into my bedroom. I would coax them

into my dreams to listen. And they would: sit, quietly, by
the dresser and let me speak. But now I cannot

do anything but rest my ear against the widening gut
of that hollow drum of silence, imagine what I will

not be able to hear from my own mouth for another week.
There is no proof I will ever again speak, ever

offer the tuned vibrations of my electric breath to a room
gorged wall-to-wall with the lustrous splendor

of listening. I feast on a banquet of steam, toast with a trio
of trills, yawn my soft palate into grace, start with one

minute of sound, then two, four then eight, rebuilding
the locomotive of stubborn flesh that pistons tremors

through my sacred jaw. I am a child's toy learning
to produce a single note. I am sheet music bound to

the shaky hand of a blind man straining his memory for chords
that just minutes ago rose up through his torso

like a flourish of color and foliage in spring. The cord in my throat
that has hemorrhaged from misuse is the same instrument

I must trust with my life to jumpstart my stalled vocal
folds and guide my flawed body back into the world

I have abandoned. Faith is a sanguine apparition I move
my lips towards like a reed I am wetting in preparation

for sound. It begins as a soft rumble that undresses
its pinched frequency, rattles kinetic like a neutron's

frenetic swell of current and then, finally, it's there: full-
bellied thunder, boundless and unbroken.