The Half-life of Grief

By Kelly Vande Plasse

It takes nearly a full year
for a nail to replace itself. To travel
from cuticle to tip, from

what is living, multiplying tissue
to what is dead. From pink
of where blood flows

to blanche of loss. I know this
because the scarred divot of nail
that was just under the skin

of my right thumb, when my dog
bit down hard, not wanting the pain
meds I forced down her throat

in the last days of her life,
has now, six months later, moved
mid-way up the nail. The half-

life of grief. This rift in my life.
The window left open, curtains iced.
Or - carved in mother of pearl -

a snow-topped mountain, cold and
ashen - a shaggy heron – its
stony stare seen from such a window.

Grief is its own season. The cleft
in my mornings. I falter:
no familiar moving from bed to bath,

anticipating where I should be next.
In the kitchen, the empty bowls
not needing to be filled. I walk

the trail without wonder. No tug
at the leash: *Keep going. Let's see what's ahead.*
No leash. Just clack of dried catalpa beans.

Red twig dogwood beaded with winter buds.

A crab apple caught in branches of rabbitbrush:
The heart flutters in its cage. Even

the goose down clouds can’t soften this grief.
And then I am home - where my dog
is not waiting. And grief is all that is left to hold.

I miss the life that contained her.
Still, I must file back the deckled edges
that snag my clothes as I dress for work.

I suppose they will soon grow smooth
as skip stones that skim
the quelled surface of a lake at dusk.

One day, I will file off the last whelks
of this gouge. The curtains
will thaw and fall closed.

Love stays.
Where
does grief go?