

Jackrabbits

William Powley

for Grandpa

Grandma teased us
for the time it took
to kill one jackrabbit
on our backyard picnic table.
She said one quick chop
to a neck was kindest,
if you meant it.

I watched. You tried.
Each cut a little deeper
and a jackrabbit struggled
on oakwood planks,
rocking a table
into our thighs.

We knew we were wrong.
We were not direct
with the blade. Grandma said,
Mercy acts quickly
and goes for a throat.

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I learned from you
a precise skill of suffering.
I learned to pull back
at just the right moment,
too late to prevent pain
but never quite cutting through.

And now I have to tell Grandma
you're dying.

She needs me to say it
clean and direct.
I speak of other things
suggesting, swaying, nearing.
She watches me, eyes narrowing.
We wait with you.