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Back Cover: Crack

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CRACK

I no longer smell the dusty chicken dirt, nor feel
the poke of hay stubs as I squat over the incubator.
Each breath hangs,
suspended in cobwebs; I try to be patient.
In the warmth of a golden lightbulb,
shadows play tricks on the eggs. I squint and sigh.

Ah! The first chip of shell!
And then —
another!
Painstaking, slow at last
from my special
speckled egg
a tiny triangle pokes out.

Hours, it seems (and an entire supper wolfed down),
before I am back in the barn and the hole is big enough
for me to spy its wee beak-chisel,
limp pipe-cleaner spine, egg-white slick,
its too-heavy head exhausted with pecking.

Every time it is still
I think it dead.....

Poppa's stern voice in my mind:
they need to peck to strengthen their necks

and me leaning into the almost-death of it, coaxing,
bargaining, worrying —
can't stand my little one's weak jabs.

and so I remove just one piece,
before the cowbell rings for bedtime,
delighted in my own freer breathing.

And in the morning, my favourite
the only one dead.

— Katie Marshall Flaherty

