

Sarah Turmail

**A Butcher and His Family's First Christmas  
After Losing a Loved One**

Candied syrup bought from the Amish store  
and my sister's name spill onto the warped  
linoleum: it's the holidays in the holler. Dad  
says her blood must be sweeter than this sugary

ham baste, as sinful as she is. Nothing more  
than an abomination he banished from his folding  
card table. He holds his tin wool under the drip  
of the sink, sharpens the butcher knife. Butcher

knives aren't cleavers—times have changed, you  
know. They're like any knife pulled from the drawer  
of spare Mason jar lids and stained hot pads. Not scary,  
but, you know, still different. This knife isn't meant

for kids, not for making PB&J's or Grandma's  
afternoon crackers and cheese. They're meant  
for work that glorifies God—slitting hog's throats,  
shaping cubed steaks and pork chops. So be wary,

kids, he says to the little cousins as he works a knife  
they can't tell from a butter spreader. This one will  
get you good, not like the other knives, he says.  
It's a dirty shame about your sister, can't she find

God, Aunt Sharon sighs to me. I think about telling  
her that she did find God, in a field of mustard  
weeds and Canadian thistle, high and tripping acid.  
Closets are for clothes, and the gays, Jeff says

to my brother. I close my eyes and think of her.  
But mostly, I only think of dad's eloquent defense  
of a butcher knife. How it lives just fine with the regular  
knives in their home amongst the Mason jar lids

and stained hot pads. Aunt Jane just looks at me  
and shakes her head. I look to the window, to the bright  
dusk, and find the stars that shine above the horizon.  
Do you see those stars, I say to Aunt Jane. Stars?

She goes to the window. Nope, can't see, not  
with the sun in the way. One day—my sister said  
to me in our mustard flower field of God—  
one day you will be brave enough to carry the sky

on your head. To burn like the stars that ignore  
the sun, and shine anyway. I see her twinkle at me  
from her place above the setting sun. I thought  
you weren't coming, I say to her. She twinkles.