

## Empty Church

We were marked and didn't even know it.  
We lived by avoiding eye contact, nights like this one,  
when the autumn air falls on the skin just long enough

for a man to feel needed, to chop and drag and forget  
the short lengths of days yet to pass. We passed  
by not knowing the cost, a price still not paid in full,

like earlier today, when our youngest daughter found lizards  
sunning through the slats of the pergola. She named them,  
made them homes. She doesn't watch the news, or know

the diction we've spilt on the counter, the corners  
we cut in the clean-up, the manufactured grace  
it takes to teeter between life and death because

of a simple choice we make to hold back breath or blow.  
What I would give to unknow, to unthink, to not speak  
of a tomorrow or a next week; I just know we can't

have reptiles running around in the house. Tonight,  
against the first frost of the year, the fire we built will go  
out simply because we didn't tend to it. It has nothing

to do with a war on impending darkness. We'll sleep in  
our bed, because our daughter is safe between us and the cold.  
And by morning, maybe all the lizards will be dead.