

Ashes

by Laurel Szymkowiak

Life is unavoidable, and
grief alkaline.

I, too, have stepped
lightly, held my breath
listening

for my mother's breath over
the monitor next to her bed.

As a stranger bathed her
Life shifted, left
the body, and the shadows deepened
within and without
me.

She had marveled, wrapped in blankets, sitting on my porch—
so many birds and flowers and

the bright gladdened her.

There are no horses in this story,
only one goldfinch, molted to autumn olive,

feet clutching the coneflower
seed head, its petals
long withered.