MUNDANE LITURGY
Mary Shelley Reid

The sky above the horizon is yawning
and drowning the kitchen in soft pink morning
light as my mother washes the dishes. Steam rises
up and curls the ends of her hair, soapy water
loosens the skin on her fingertips, and I wonder
how she manages to hold the world together
with those hands. That evening she’s stringing
white lights up on the tree slowly and gingerly,
and I think about all the things we do to keep
out the dark.

Is not that the very essence of the human
condition—crawling through tunnels,
inching across dirt and mud, grasping
for the light at the end?

My grandmother’s soft and honeyed drawl
floats out to sit on top of the damp summer air
while the porch swing sings and the street light
on the corner flickers in rhythm with the crickets,
and I marvel at how such tired eyes could inspire
such wonder. After the children go to bed,
she and I sit on the porch and our laughter
rises up to the rafters and brings relief to my bones.
Later, as I fall asleep, I notice that the heaviness
is gone from my chest.
It has to come from somewhere, doesn’t it—
the light—even in minuscule
pinpricks, like stars poking through
the darkness of the night sky.

The trees are bare and wanting when we are walking
through the same woods in which I made my home as a child,
and a little hand is grasping your finger. I show
him how to call out to his echo, and as such a small voice
booms off the walls of this vast place, I remember
the crows-feet smile of my grandfather that taught me
to always bellow toward the light, and a grateful
laugh escapes from my lungs. On Sunday, the church’s
song is rising up to the heavens, and for a moment
I feel that the heavens are singing back.

It comes like that, sometimes—
not in flashes or sparks,
but like the rain
in glorious magnanimity.