Ken Stange

Ranking The Elements
(For Kate at Eleven)

What’s in a name? Everything: all the elements, and understanding too.
Our voice defines us—and all the universe as well. —Hippokrites

The sun is brazing earth’s edge.

We let our canoe slide us
to where ever it wishes to be.

The lake is more than black
and I search for metaphors.

“Obsidian,” you remark, startling me.

Leeward the shadow of our vessel opens
a dark window in the black mirror
beyond which strange tendrils wave

“Mop Muck,” you name
the translucent algae
that does indeed look like old string mops
my mother used, but I didn’t know
you’d ever seen.

Hell, it isn’t fire (stolen from the Gods) that matters.

Nor is it water from where we came.
Nor is it earth to where we’ll go.

It is a young girl’s words in Now’s air
that ultimate gift
the gift of naming
that matters most.