

JACKIE BARTLEY

My Father Died in Spring

and no wonder: Spring's a cold, green splash
in the face. It's strawberries doused in Tabasco,
a comedy, done rare, still bloody in the middle.
It's Mother Theresa visiting Tiffany's.
The feel of beginning again,
an exfoliation, the tingling skin: remember,
you are alive.

Three nights in a row now,
I've dreamed of test tubes and blood types,
antigens and antibodies. The tight, red disc
at the bottom of a centrifuged tube. Gentle
shake to see that the cells don't cling,
that the unit of blood will be
compatible, deliver oxygen.

Eat your meat, my mother said.
Somewhere people are starving.
I ate, I eat, I will eat.

Hell's Bells, my father said,
to underscore absurdity. *That boy's the reason
you gave up your faith.*
The way I might give up
candy for Lent, a dollar to a shiftless friend.
Incompatible: doubt and my bow-legged faith.

Baby, he said, *I can't walk you down the aisle.*
And so, he didn't.
I walked myself.

A single red cell's hardly
red at all, but together they form a rich, red pool.
The priest's green vestments every Sunday in the long
trail of Sundays after Pentecost. Until Christmas—
blood drops on snow—and
the liturgy begins again.

