

# WINTER BURIAL

JOEANN HART

He met her at the gate with the cart  
and she covered the animal with a sheet.  
They pulled together to the place  
behind the barn.  
The ground was frozen.  
They laid their friend on the hard earth  
adjusting his head, his yellowed horns  
ridged with years.  
She tucked the sheet around him,  
collecting his dignity.  
It's a dirty business  
storing a body for the winter.  
They carried the black box  
and covered him.  
Stacking heavy stones on that  
against the predators.  
Snow was coming.  
They might not see the box for a long while.  
Say a prayer, he said.  
I have no words.  
Write a poem then, later.  
I don't write poetry, she said.  
You will, he said.

The ground opened in March,  
a sudden, violent thaw.  
They peeled away wet leaves made dark by time.  
The shovels cut through fibrous roots  
like matted fur.  
Runners hard as shins were severed.  
The water table was high.  
Life coursed beneath their feet.  
They removed the stones  
then the black box, letting it fall aside.  
The body was fresh  
as if they just found him in the barn,  
the morning sun a shaft of dusty light.  
Worn hooves and gloved hands met  
for the unseemly haul to the pit  
which swallowed him whole.  
Then relief. He was where he was meant to be.  
She tilted his horns to display his glory,  
and said a prayer.  
God.  
Nothing else came.

When the hole was filled  
they went to the shed for rakes  
to smooth over what'd been done.  
On return, a goat was standing on the grave  
staring down, comprehending,  
or not,  
as his friend got ready to do  
the hard work of becoming one  
with the land.