

CELLO, 8TH GRADE

AUSTIN KODRA

Like holding a telephone at your fingertips.

Our teacher turned her hand from ear to chest-level
as though she was hanging up an old desk phone—

it was how we were supposed to grip our bows,
press them to string, our hacksaws with bundles
of fine nylon teeth. But instead of carving notes
from steel, we drummed the hollow out of f-holes
and laughed when told to quiet down.

We're here to find another way to speak,
she said, showing us how to slick the bows
over sticky rosin like tongues over hard candy,
unscrew and draw out endpins like measuring tapes,
and we thought to ourselves the time to speak had passed.

And when she played Bach's Prelude to Suite No. 1
on the school's old Casio cassette deck, the boy
in the last chair who'd always kept to himself,
who couldn't play scales without a rabid screech
on the bridge, said the gruff sweeps across the C-string

sounded like his father he spoke to once a week,

barking orders through a prison phone
faster than his son could carry them out:

*Clean the gutters. Change the deadbolt.
Wash the windows. Flip the mattresses.
Make me proud, son.*

And for what felt
like the first time, we didn't know
what to say or do, we only let his last note
linger in our throats until our teacher lifted
her hands and we were forced, once more, to play.