

To Respond

Today you took out the tiller
did six passes, cutting a fifteen
by fifteen foot square into our front lawn.
Our toddler follows with his Little Tykes
mower, mimicking each pass and turn.
After, you scatter a brown bag of seeds,
the miracle of nitrogen-fixing,
of cover crop, field peas and oats
ready to sow themselves into spring.

Neighbors pause to watch from their safe distance.
I survey from the porch, holding my own distance.

I mourned all mourning and when I went to jog
my miles, it wasn't the muscles but that marvelous
Japanese word *Kokoro*—the mind-heart—that felt tired.
Tilling over the morning's news of a friend
who took his own life in Liguria. The joy
of his expat existence spiraled into something
we'll never fully see. This same morning
we decide to cancel our trip to Italy,
no days this summer in Tivoli to show our son
his beloved waterfalls and fountains flowing
from the Sabine hills. So many griefs
pebbles and boulders, all with their weight.

You respond by turning earth into food.
I respond by turning tears into words.

Respond linked to the Latin root:
to sponsor, to pledge. To make
an answer, a ritual act.

You know, when you till up the grass like that
myriad little flies swarm above the earth.

All that movement below surfaces and scatters
in the late afternoon light.

The buzzing dust of the earth cut open
before the soil settles, readying itself for new roots.

My husband, I pledge my words
to your earth.