

THE MEASURING

by Jared Carter

You're sickly pale – a crooked root.
But one last remedy remains:
before the dawn we'll go on foot
through grass sleeked down by heavy rains
to the sexton's house. Already he
takes down his spade, and goes
to walk among the whitened rows.
His wife awaits with lengths of string
necessary for measuring.

She has no fire alight, nor words
to spare, but bolts the wooden door
and helps you out of clothes that fall
soundlessly to the floor. Naked,
you mount the table and recline;
she comes, her eight stiff fingers
trailing bright bits of twine. First,
crown to nose, then mouth to chin,
pressing against each crevice, in
and down the length of your cold frame –
whispering unintelligible names.

The feet are last to stretch: from heel
to toe each one must be times seven
the other piece. She nods, and knots
the two together, breathes her spell,
then turns to go. I leave a pair
of silver dollars there, and take
the string to tie where it will rot
the winter long, on hinge of gate,
wheelbarrow shaft, or eaves-trough's fall.

Behind us, where the darkness drains,
a blackbird settles on the roof
and calls back to another that rain
is coming like an awful proof.
The two denounce the scratching sound
the sexton's spade makes on the ground –
measuring off the careful square
of someone else expected there.