

HOPE COULTER

The Burial

He who taught me to break the lumps of dirt between my fingers,
pulling out weeds with the tines of a planting-fork,
to level and smooth the surface, then draw a groove
with the tip of the trowel, the hoe for a straight-edge—

he who shared with me the packets of seeds, tearing their corners
with a grimy thumb, and showed me the way to shake them not in clumps
but evenly spaced, though the line didn't have to be perfect,
he said, because later we'd thin the plants—

he who peered with me at the seeds in their dirt beds,
some specks, some hard-shelled, and some like little beans,
had me cover them with their fine dirt blanket,
then pat and tamp the soil in the row we had made,

and stood up with me to survey it, our flattened mound
from which in time the shoots would poke,
so that visions of green profusion fed our minds
even then, as we brushed the dirt crumbs off our jeans—

we planted him in the ground today, in a hole my brothers dug,
pushed the loam down over his box with our palms, with the heels
of our hands, patted and tamped it smooth, the way he liked,
then stepped back to gaze at the blurry sight of what we had made.

Although some would say it was just the wind
stirring the leaves overhead, I believe I heard him sigh
as he settled, shifting his ashes and bone bits this way and that,
nestling into the pockets of dust like a satisfied infant laid to sleep.



ABOUT HOPE COULTER



Hope Coulter has published in such journals as *The Carolina Quarterly*, *New Delta Review*, and *Rattle*. Her honors include a Puschcart nomination (2008) and the Porter Prize for Literary Excellence, and in 2012 she was named a finalist for the James Hearst Poetry Prize. She lives in Little Rock, Arkansas, and teaches creative writing at Hendrix College.

