

*A Newer, Better Version
of How You Died*

by Allison Emmaline Piercy

I'm trying out new ways
to tell the story of you. (You see,

the comings and goings of six summers
have made it stale. I'm not dying anymore;

neither are you, for that matter.) In this one,
seventeen years—turkey sandwiches,

Nebraska fishing, dental school—
were enough to close the circle.

By mutual agreement, you and God
decide, golly, that's well enough

enough. Nothing drags you
from your bed into the whiteness.

In this one, you just pull a string in your brain—
poof!—so it blows up like a life raft

and you drift up and up and up.
God holds out his catcher's mitt

and takes a great big sniff of you, like a new baby
or an old book. Still ripe like a heap of old flowers.

You are happier, after that, in God's great big summer camp
for seventeen-year-old boys.

Time is just one cloud in the biggest sky you've ever seen.
You lose the shape of it while wrestling on the bunk ladder,

or making holy lanyards, trampling moons underfoot
when the dinner bell rings. When he tucks you into bed, the ceiling is dirt

and real flowers, just like back home. And you sleep better than anything.
In this one, you have no parents, no sister Martha,

no brother Mark. You have dirty feet,
and no one has to miss you.

In this one, heaven doesn't even
matter. What matters is when

God loads up all the boys in the van
for an afternoon down at the river, when

you jump off the pier and plunge straight
into a prickly cluster of river-weeds

and in that frozen joy of submersion,
where plant and sun and stream all stream

together, a silver dart swipes past your ankle.
Scale and flickering. Your brain tells you

bluegill, before you remember
bluegills, or fishing line,

or hands; then it tells you, *you are in the Missouri River*,
and only after, what it's like to have

a pair of glasses, and legs,
and a name. For a minute there,

you are a boy who eats
turkey sandwiches

and completes all his circles. For a minute there,
you reach beside you for the pole

you left in your uncle's shed in Copeland Bend,
and you can smell fish and metal,

and close your fingers on it all so nearly
that nothing but the voice of God

could shake you from it—who does,
and tells you get out and dry off;

it is time
to head back home.