Stitches

Cassandra Fleming

The chipped skeleton of
orange paint and metal bars,
curled around itself in a dome,
haunting our playground,
daring us to climb.

My sister scrabbled up its sides,
into the creamy sky, with only seven
years to weigh her down.
Her tiny fingers danced over the rungs
until they tripped.

She was a falling cloud,
wrapped in a fleece coat,
I thought I would catch her,
I knew I would catch her
but gravity beat me to it.

The bars bit her neck,
and the wood chips scythed her skin
and the ground punched the air from her lungs
and I just stood there and watched
my sister crumple.

The morning after, before we even knew it would scar,
I spilled my Cheerios all over the breakfast table.
The milk ran onto my sister’s bare feet,
the color of yesterday’s sky.
“Sorry,” I mumbled.
A row of black stitches smiled back at me.