

Biology lesson

By Joanna Lilley

I was at the biology lesson
that was supposed to make it all make sense,
when Mr Watson drew God on the
blackboard and said death was good.

Everything alive would die
and decompose. It was better
to be buried than be burned.
Everything killed something

else in order to survive.
I called out I didn't;
I was a herbivore.
He told me I'd get ill;

I wasn't a cow or a rabbit.
The class thought that was funny.
I sketched a rabbit on the cover
of my exercise book.

I had a rabbit at home
with a tumour on his spine
who I was keeping alive.
On Sunday, my mother made me

help her dig the garden.
She sat back on the heels
of her rubber boots, muddying
the backside of her old blue trousers.

She said: Last week I stuck a fork
into the soil and heard a scream.
She'd stabbed a frog.
She definitely heard it scream.

I was the first person she'd told.
She'd put the body in the compost.
She wished now she'd buried it
where the daffodils grew.

We watched a mosquito bite
her forearm, blood ballooning
in its abdomen. It looked too heavy

to fly but it reached the raspberries.
If my mother had squashed it, her
own blood would have smeared her skin.
She started digging with the fork
but I dug with blunt fingers.

I was the heroine in a film, mud-smeared
face, long black hair flowing,
a silhouette against a thunderous sky,
shouting: Nobody else dies here!