

# THE DISAPPEARED

by Luke Epplin

Winter that year they fell into absence like leaves from trees,  
one by one, spirited away by forces of wind and rain.

Spring their remains washed up in rivers, were scraped from  
stone ovens. But no one saw anything. Sourceless stories

spread in whispers: how the unnamed hunkered in four-foot  
iron cages, were force-fed salt then denied water for days,

had their shins rubbed with broomsticks until they bled.  
Summer their ghosted bodies materialized in the city's

empty spaces, straying through basement bars, two-bit motels,  
and libraries, claiming unused seats on the midnight metro.

The named hurried head-down through the haunted streets,  
willfully mute, until all that echoed was silence.

Autumn the leaves fell once again and were quickly vanished.  
This time the barren mother trunks bore witness, their veined

branches still bent under the weight of every lost leaf, each one  
a memory ringed enduringly around the hidden heartwood.