

*Bronwen Butter Newcott***What Is Left Behind**

We used to pick cicada shells off bark and chain-link fences,
move them to our shirts – half-fascinated, half-horrified
by the air-swelled eyes and barbed hook-feet –

the horror of possibility. We weren't scared then to pinch them,
hear them crunch between our fingers, the violent crackles
of more than dry leaf, flecks of membrane

stuck to the skin of our thumbs, the bulbous eyes gone.
We never studied the skeletons' wingless shapes,
didn't put our mouths close, moisten the ghost-bodies

with our breath, even tongues, to see if they tasted sweet
like burnt sugar, to see if we too could breathe life
into lifelessness, make the head turn, the legs claw.

But we've learned there were careful steps
that pulled fresh bodies, green-bellied with leaf-veined wings,
through slits and left the shells behind, still malleable,

the adults soft beside, wings hardening to flight,
the shell drying too. We knew nothing of process,
only that something had happened and left a fragile shape.