Scrubbing the Skillet,

I realize my daughter just turned seven and doesn’t know

I was seven when my mother crept into my carpeted room

while I played a video game to say my father, who had been

far away taking fluids from tubes in a California hospital,

had died. My daughter doesn’t know I said OK and kept

playing so my mother would leave, so I could feel

how it felt not to have a father, or how having a father

who was dead was supposed to feel because I already

knew what not having a father felt like. Now, my daughter

doesn’t know I can hear her cartoon spilling from the TV

as I finish the dishes, doesn’t know I am building the scene

I imagine unwinding inside her mind, the one where she

helps the town children rope their runaway mare scared

and stuck in the mountains, even though my daughter doesn’t

know how to ride a horse. But in this scene, if someone

were to tell my daughter her father had died, she’d know
to calmly walk the mare back all the way into town, whispering

into the animal’s ear how pretty she was, how sweet, because

most nights, beside my tired daughter in her dark room

as she curves against sleep, that’s what she whispers to me.