Tania Pryputniewicz is graduate of the Iowa Writers’ Workshop and a co-founding blogger for Tarot for Two and Mother Writer Mentor. Saddle Road Press published her debut poetry collection, November Butterfly. Recent poems appeared or are forthcoming at Extract(s), NonBinary Review, One, Patria Letteratura, and Poetry Flash. She lives in San Diego, California, with her husband and three children. She can be found online at www.taniapryputniewicz.com.
WALKING THE LAGUNA

for Reginald Shepherd, 1964–2008

Your life’s dates appear beneath your poem
in this month’s issue of Poetry—casual white ink

on dark blue page. Hours later at a party,
Bethany stoops to pick up a bleached skull,

scooping dank Earth out of eyeless orbits.
What kind of animal do you think this was?

she asks the children. Ahead, the bull
faces us: ten five-year-olds, their mothers,

the birthday boy’s father. A newborn goat
leaps sideways in a skitter to our midst:

knobbed hips, thin lips, tiny tongue,
relief of his body knocking into mine,

pompous grass at my feet and wet metal
clouds wicking into my chest, as if wrong

to care this much or cry for you, your guard
around me when we danced in Iowa discrete

but loyal as this bull, tips of horn pricking sky.
Bethany repeats, Hug the fence, though no-one
does, us mothers lifting younger siblings
into arms the one tense moment he chose

not to charge despite sleet suck of boots
lifting from muck so near his herd, pale
yellow warblers fleeing. Bethany, with mud streaked fingers, cautious as a lover, traces

the curtain of cursive u’s on a second skull where three bone plates met, knit, fusing
to house a life they were meant to protect, her child asking, What’s that writing on its neck?