

national poetry month

Poem in Your Pocket Day

The First Second

from the chapbook *What Happens When We Leave* by J. Todd Hawkins,
winner of the 2018 William D. Barney Memorial Chapbook Contest

in a time too dense for light
too hot for electrons to condense to atoms
still, we were there

we came from the rend of mass & force
the uncoupling of noun & verb
we are only what is left
after particles & antiparticles
have eaten each other

I called into the winter of the universe
into the particle desert
& I confessed to things you would not believe,
things I thought had no meaning
in this time before time was meaningful

gases begat stars, stars begat galaxies
& the universe became ever more transparent
cooling toward absolute zero

eons later, we sit,
eating slate gray cheeses with rinds of ash
& leave nothing in the snow
not even prints or bones or teeth
not even echoes or traces of echoes on the clouds