Hunting Henry, Calling Echo

Denise Pendleton
Yet again they have slipped away
and now gone, pulled our full
attention to them
their bodies our burden
their lives our love lost and what
might not survive this time.
Always they will strain at the leash
we put them on, steal out the door,
through the gate we haven’t
closed and then they go. They flee,
nose to the ground, fleet-footed, and we see
an urgent need we can’t ourselves
possess and they pass swiftly
out of sight. We call
and call because we don’t
know where or when we’ll get them back

but it’s our job to try because this dog
is our dog with our tag on its collar, its vet bills,
its muddy feet on our floor and its bark and growl
that can frighten our best friends away. Why

oh why do we bring them into our home,
these creatures on four legs shedding hairs
that add to our mundane chores, whose needs only
further disorder our days, whose names

ring out in our fields as we call
and call as if they understand our need
to own them, to know this dog is ours, as if
they really do love us without condition

even as they race away to what beckons
and what they must have to satisfy their deepest
yearning. What are we really calling out
to have back but this life we deemed our own

within the fenced in yard we paid to have
built just for them, the devotion we believed
ours forever as they gaze at us with their
puppy eyes, touch their damp noses

to our palms, lean their warm fur
against our bare skin? We didn’t know
how far in they would come
to the life we thought was ours

but they take it from us a few
minutes, a few hours at a time
every day and we keep calling,
calling Here Henry, Come Echo,

believing we’ll get this life back
to complicate thus comfort our own.
Denise Pendleton holds an MFA in Poetry from Washington University and is a recipient of The Jinx Walker Poetry Prize of the Academy of the American Poets. Her poems have appeared in American Sports Poems edited by May Swenson and Northwest Review, Tar River Poetry, and Kerning among others. Pendleton has taught writing to college students and held a variety of nonprofit jobs as an educator “from the balcony” to promote reading for all ages.