



Image: “Loss for Words” by Asher ReTech. “Budget Cuts” was written by Danny Eisenberg for *Rattle’s* Ekphrastic Challenge, September 2019, and selected as the Editor’s Choice.

Budget Cuts

by Danny Eisenberg

At some point we realized what we owed
in back pay we couldn’t pay back; our goose

was cooked, our pancake overturned, *kapowww!!*
the wet half smooch-side to the linoleum. It had been

a good ride though, hadn’t it, us on our steeds,
galloping in time to the cardinals to meet up again

at the antipodes, each of us richer and ready to spend
a severed arm or a leg on amputee-strength painkillers—

Those were our Chernobyl days, our Exxon Valdez days,
our Hurricane-Andrew-for-days days, all white

and no yolk, all oil and nucleotides and
mitochondria, the powerhouse of the cell. Yes,

there was a man’s man, looking each of us back
from the lake; and also there, lingering abreast, a stooge,

his Charlie Chaplin suit the mushroomy shade
of disaster relief, his fingers as tightly gripped

around the handle of his tattered attaché as were his teeth
around the affricate he stitched onto the label: *Ah-touch-ay*

(always a touchy subject). We must have known
he would come back to kill us for insulin money, eventually,

a thing we knew like we knew how to cure cancer:
the diagnosis is the vaccine itself. Reapers come

in pairs now, like Bible salesmen, to toll the bell and wait
for me to invite them into my godless kitchen

where pot after pot of leaden tap water froths
and boils, turning to gold I scald myself to touch.