A Poem for S.
By Jessica Greenbaum

Because you used to leaf through the dictionary, 
Casually, as someone might in a barber shop, and 
Devotedly, as someone might in a sanctuary, 
Each letter would still have your attention if not 
For the responsibilities life has tightly fit, like 
Gears around the cog of you, like so many petals 
Hinged on a daisy. That’s why I’ll just use your 
Initial. Do you know that in one treasured story, a 
Jewish ancestor, horseback in the woods at Yom 
Kippur, and stranded without a prayer book, 
Looked into the darkness and realized he had 
Merely to name the alphabet to ask forgiveness— 
No congregation of figures needed, he could speak 
One letter at a time because all of creation 
Proceeded from those. He fed his horse, and then 
Quietly, because it was from his heart, he 
Recited them slowly, from aleph to tav. Within those 
Sounds, all others were born, all manner of 
Trials, actions, emotions, everything needed to 
Understand who he was, had been, how flaws 
Venerate the human being, how aspirations return 
Without spite. Now for you, may your wife’s 
X-ray return with good news, may we raise our 
Zarfs to both your names in the Great Book of Life.