

## ABSTRACT

Title of Thesis: EMBRACE: POEMS

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The themes in this collection of poems center on location, memory, and identity. Many of the poems are travel poems that reside in a specific geographic and temporal locations but which, in the course of the poems, expand outward to capture the emotional landscape projected by the speaker. The poems also focus on familial and romantic relationships, while exploring the attempt to navigate an identity that is defined, or reinforced, by connectivity. A large number of poems investigate the relationship of memory to identity, not only examining memories for their story content, but also probing the change in relationships when an individual loses his or her capability to remember—how that loss of memory affects those around him or her as well as perceptions of self, identity, and the way in which we connect.

EMBRACE: POEMS

By

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## Dedication

*For my family, by birth and by choice.*

## Acknowledgements

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## Embrace

Asleep, she sighs  
and turns  
tucks herself  
against that place  
from where woman  
is said  
to have come

that place  
where there is still  
a childhood scar  
from when  
he fell  
a half-buried root  
turning into his side

his body  
shell-pink and delicate  
he lay still  
feeling breathless

feeling

blood seep through

his shirt

to thicken

and dry

like a brushstroke

marking

the place

where his mother had

pressed her hand

to stop

the rush of blood

where the skin

would someday

pucker

into a ridge

and feel warm

to the touch

and sleeping



she curves

instinctive

against that side

in warmth

and its excess

## Abu Simbel

In the crook of the mountain's arm  
there is a temple built for a queen,  
decorated with androgynous forms  
in postures of loving – a youth,  
gracefully thin, extends one arm  
dance-like, downward, to give  
an open lotus to another who is  
kneeling, hair falling forward  
to cover what might be breasts,  
hand forward to accept.

The bright February sun is not warm.  
I am here to see the Ramses temples  
dug into new hills by architects and  
engineers, stone un-built and reburied  
on the Nile's new edge. Angular figures  
stiffly postured in prayer and combat,  
lean across stone panels, ignore  
slender incisions beneath each foot.  
Aging quietly, they have outlasted gods.

Touching the wall, I can't find seams.  
Instead, there is just enough room  
to place one finger in the groove and trace  
the outline of a lotus blossoming. Dust  
on my fingers, cold and flecked with ancient  
greens and reds, smells of dried ferns.  
I can trace the forward-pointing feet  
of a goddess still posed in movement.  
She knows. It is a stone older than love  
we break the heart against.

## Lanzarote

It wasn't a relationship, but it wasn't fucking  
since we never got that far. It was just skin,  
the smell of talcum and sea salt.

This island of three hundred volcanoes  
had melted and remolded, licked  
its crust in hot cat-flows, enclosed

by unrelenting water slapping greenly  
against advances. The heat  
was sharp, too white – it cut

against the eyes, chased us under umbrellas.

In too much shade, the wind traced my back's  
curve, fingering skin into thousands of

tiny bumps. Piloerections, you called them.

Black lava-flecks in my arms, your thighs,  
the conch-whirls of our ears, everywhere

it shouldn't be, everywhere it could.

Days break in pale succession, roll

over in waking surprise.

An open window where

I hear the waves, but can't see them;

sliced morning oranges in a cobalt bowl.

## Winter Solstice, England

It gets dark here at three thirty in the afternoon.

Each morning I wake to evening sky;

the morning dusk lasts for only a handful  
of hours, until night draws in again, impatient.

Walking along the two lane road to my house,  
a dog barks and is quiet. Yellow lights cut square

windows, reminding me that the day is less than  
half gone: there are hours of night ahead.

It's the kind of sky that gradually ripens, until  
it seems it was always this way. There's no dog,

there's no road, there are only the yellow squares  
and the smell of snow. This should feel lonely.

It's not possible to judge the distance to the house,  
where I've forgotten to leave on a light.

## Calling Home From Egypt

It's four p.m. here—no idea  
what it is there, somewhere west. The station screams  
with activity, busy-robed bodies  
pull carts of children and string-tied boxes,  
wilting in the heat. The south-bound  
tourist train has minutes to arrive.

One hand covers my open ear,  
the other cups my chin and the perforated  
black mouthpiece, filters out whistles  
and roars. No connecting click, just a woman's  
voice breaking through static, answering  
somewhere on the other end.

*You won't believe it here.  
They have these dried lotus blossoms,  
crumpled like old cotton bolls. Floated  
in water, they unfold. The whole room  
smelled up with hyacinth. I had to  
open a window.*

## In Summer

The women of my family gather in groups,  
lawn chairs circled in the square shade  
of the house. Dewy and pink—*women don't sweat,*  
*they glow*—they fan themselves with paper plates  
and eye the children who chase one another  
with handfuls of blueberries.

My sister-in-law joins them. Her palm, hesitant,  
smoothes the flat husk of her stomach. I watch  
her lift an empty yellow plate and fan with  
the other hand, until all the women are waving  
like butterflies—not fast enough to create lift,  
but wavering in the still, humid air.

It has always been this way—the moving illusion  
of flight. For just an instant, the circles sway  
in unison, like petals. They laugh.

My grandmother touches a nearby knee,  
and the fluttering slows, one paper wing  
alternating with its neighbor.



Looking at my mother—*so there you are*—

I try to remember knowing her before

her body was not *our body*,

try to imagine back to still, warm waters—

*here I am*. I don't sit.

The drift swelters, provides no relief.

## Love Poem

Our late afternoon game—  
my grandfather and I  
snapping beans or shelling  
peas, soft chimes  
in the bowl at our feet.  
After awhile,  
he'd ping a long one  
at the metal garden bucket  
and ask, *How's love?*  
It helped, having something  
to do with my hands. *Ending.*  
Fingers split the pod,  
small trio ringing the bowl.  
A nod, *just takes time*  
*to get right.* He looked  
towards the kitchen  
window, where Nan's  
shadow worried back and  
forth, moving silverware  
from counter to table

and back again.

Piling shells in our laps

on faded dishtowels,

we finished and tossed

them at the bucket. Closer

to dinner time, we gathered

up the shells the bucket missed,

waited for the sun to settle

behind the house.

## Pacific Tour, 1946

Tell me again, how you  
were crazy to go alone, an officer  
with six-hundred dollars, only  
a handful of words.

Tell me that you were  
alone in Peking, alone in the rickshaw.

The market smelled of fried taro  
and pears, you couldn't eat

the delicate fried-grasshopper,  
but gave it to a laughing child,  
who showed her teeth.

Stopping on a street

that smelled of garlic,  
outside a narrow doorway,  
hens scratched at cabbages.

The mother of the house, *mu qin*,

led you inside, a circular table,  
low to the ground,  
scraped your knees,  
as you tried to fold beside it.

She brought green tea, no sugar,  
in bone-white porcelain  
while her sons poured *jen ju*,  
pearls, from squat bushel baskets,

covering the table  
in a shell-colored heap.

Drawing your fingers  
across the pile, you

brought a handful to  
your mouth, felt them  
with your lips, the  
pinks and whites, oblong

and round, smooth,  
misshapen, that took

hours to sort, until you  
were satisfied with sixty,

hid them for weeks  
in your dress-whites.

Three strands: your wife,  
sister, and mother.

Now, your wife keeps  
hers in a jade box.

I, your daughter, have  
the other two, combined

them into a double-strand  
and keep them safe  
in a box with  
my birth certificate.

To please you, I wear them  
on your birthday, watch  
your eyes brighten as you tell,  
again, their story.

## To My Virginity

You were more sophisticated,  
could catch the eye, and flirt.  
You made me feel clumsy, childish.  
You didn't approve of my friends  
or when I wore lipstick. When I told you  
I let David Rickman touch  
my almost-breasts on the church hayride,  
you weren't shocked, just smirked  
and admitted he touched you too.  
You weren't a worry, came home  
at curfew, told my parents  
I was on the porch, saying goodnight.  
You never embarrassed me,  
had too much to drink and stumbled home  
on a Sunday morning, or told how  
my high school boyfriend bit my lip,  
made it bleed on my first real kiss.  
You just got quiet, and I'd wonder  
what you were thinking about.  
We got older, and sometimes

at parties I thought I'd see you duck out  
for a quick smoke. But when I'd look again  
you were leaning against a wall,  
like you never left.

We stopped confiding in each other.

You were too critical; I was too sensitive.

You kept borrowing my favorite sweater  
and looked better in it. It would sit in my closet,  
make everything smell like cigarettes  
and jasmine. We didn't talk much  
on the car rides home from college,  
at Thanksgivings and Christmases.  
You eventually gave up on holidays,  
said you didn't believe in them.



## After You Left

You weren't as skinny  
as I remembered

though I didn't touch you  
to be sure

didn't see all of you  
at first just

your shoulders  
in a London crowd

your lanky gait  
in the Prague train station

it was your face  
in a bus heading north

I couldn't be sure  
until you were standing

in front of me

face luminous

I said nothing

You said *Speak*

finger sketching

the line of my collarbone

*Speak*— thumbs running

along eyebrows

to cheekbones down

to jaw *Speak*

until my face was captured

in your hands

but I still said

nothing and you

bent my head back

face moving

down to cover

my still-closed mouth

## Gail Helen

All your life you felt your sister  
must have been prettier. Born perfect, she died  
three days later, struggling to open her lungs.  
Moist, closed flowers. You never forgave  
your father for saying you were born  
with a squashed nose. You think of her,  
calla lily, curled in the cold Ohio ground  
above your grandfather's broad chest.  
Years pass before you give her name  
to your daughter for safekeeping. She inherited  
a weakness, would sometimes choke on air.  
Watching her struggle, you think of your mother.  
Your hand rubs the soft infant chest.  
Petals open like gills, draw in the flush red air.

## Falling Into Bed in Cairo

The curtains were some sort of brocade—  
heavier on one side of the open window.

I closed my eyes against the orange city streetlights  
and the outside smell of oranges.

I slept somehow, too tired for dreams,  
and woke in darkness to a voice. No, woke  
to several voices overlapping, sustaining one long vowel.

Then I heard the echo of more voices,  
muezzins, calling from concrete tower-tops, in elegant,  
thicketed mosques. Night-herons, still, then lithe over water.

The furthest was lilting, as though carried  
over water, from the banks of an orange city.

The voices chanted and broke, a lone male  
carrying the word to its end.

I couldn't tell if the light behind the window was dawn.

## Age Twenty-Three, Observing My Grandmother's Hands

*Look at them*, she says, stretching them out over pretend piano keys.

Knuckles swollen, tendons pulling the fingers, she reaches for my hand, pats it, *Your hands are cold*, chuffs it between hers.

Gnarled and reddish, they look like hands that have worked in hot water and harsh soap, that once suffered chilblains and no gloves. They seem at odds with this woman, who gardens and once played “Just as I Am” on the Victorian rosewood

after supper. They are still soft, as smooth as my face, when she presses my hand, folds my fingers with hers. *Look at them*. For years she was the back-rub giver, rubbed so hard that our muscles rang, and to finish, she slapped each back

once for emphasis, leaving us breathless and stung. Now, she smooths one hand with the other, rubs the gold wedding ring over her finger—she can't get it off.

She holds the left hand out, shows how her fingers overlap,

follows the line of each finger in a gentle, straightening motion. They fall back together, graceful as tree roots. *Look at them*, she says. *These are my hands*.

And she touches the tip of my middle finger, a young woman's finger

that curves at the end, bending towards the pinky. When did they begin to curve under the tip of the ring finger? She grips my hand more tightly.

*Look at them. Look closer.*

## Journey By Train

### *1. York to Edinburgh*

We passed Durham and Newcastle,  
jogged through cityscapes and back  
over the moors into oilseed fields cut down  
to stalks, fallow and lean in October.  
The countryside moved south,  
away from me, facing the back of the train.  
It was easier to look out this way, with more time  
to watch what I'm leaving: harvested fields,  
swift, bare rows of earth, then rock.  
The North Sea crept in, menacing  
the coastline, brooding like water after a storm.  
Train-cars flew along rails,  
smoothing past a stone cottage,  
sudden at the water's edge. Stones  
dangled from the thatch; a rusted  
green bicycle leaned against the cottage wall.  
On a hillock, there was a man, black cap  
in one hand, arms fully extended, waving  
open-palmed at the train. They flickered



as they moved, wavering as though in a silent,  
Chaplin film. It was as if he knew someone  
on the train, someone watching for him, heading north.  
His arms were still moving when the train  
turned inland, and I lost sight.

## 2. *Dublin to Galway*

Everything looked like it had just rained:  
low stone walls, black cows grazed  
along smooth green furrows, spring hay bent  
heavily in one direction. The saturated air  
beaded on the windows of the train. Gray clouds,  
gray sky, seemed to ebb, receding westward  
like an ocean wave. The air smelled of salt  
and copper or peat. We passed the tall pencil points  
of monastery towers, lurching upward  
from ruined churches, the leaning, broken teeth  
of graveyards, sheep cropping the grass below.  
A one room cottage—maybe a hay barn—  
swept past. It was cracked and falling,  
roofless, in verdant, wet fields.  
All that was left was a single eastern wall, reaching up  
to a sharp point where there should have been  
thatch or slate. A single, centered window cut  
even squares of sky.

### 3. *Marseilles to Nice*

The French Riviera trains were double-decker.  
Cars reached upward, window-glass curving  
over second floor seats, like an atrium.  
From the upper deck, the rock-coast fell  
more abruptly: a hint of slope, a rock edge, then nothing  
but the postcard view. Emerging from the rock,  
the train bent into the half moon arc  
of a cove, terraced gardens stepping down  
in clipped, green layers, then sheer to turquoise water.  
I could only assume there was a sandy beach  
at bottom. Small, anchored boats bobbed like moons,  
rising with waves, but not drifting  
any closer to shore. A new tunnel ahead,  
cars burrowed into rock, towards the next cove,  
the next crescent of sand. White moon beaches,  
empty, cold. The train, ahead, pitched into sunlight,  
into another black tunnel.

#### 4. *Vienna to Innsbruck*

The train, nearing the station, slowed.

We left mountain rock for neatly allotted  
vegetable gardens and tool sheds  
at each garden edge. No one was gardening,  
or hanging laundry: no shirts or dresses  
waved in the train-generated breeze.

The rectangled gardens were just beginning:  
thin, green rows in dark, wet earth.

The mud, almost black. One had a flower border:  
tulips, red with yellow piping, dipped  
their heads above a low wire fence.

They were planted recently, too cold for bulbs.

Then the gardens stopped;  
industrial stucco and glass expanded  
higher over the view. Brown tiles  
covered roofs and corners, lining edges  
in a medieval brown. Narrow stone  
alleyways flashed between buildings.

If you looked up at the right moment,  
cobble alleys gave way

to earth-brown roofs, then snow-topped mountains  
that erupted on the far end of town,  
peering back.

5. *Sienna to Florence*

In Tuscany, wine country, it was too late  
in the year for anything but brown vines,  
drying in neat, partitioned rows.  
Slender dirt paths combed through them,  
leaving enough space for one man  
to walk between the rows. Partially hidden  
by hills, five square towers overlooked  
the valley. Stark, medieval stone, roan-colored:  
russet among white limestone.  
An iron cross, made of single bars,  
topped the tallest, and somewhere inside  
there must have been a bell.  
I could hear its rusted alto  
ring and fade, ring and fade. Then still.  
Not a place of worship, not a fortress;  
harsh stone angles cutting  
at neatly divided ground.

6. *Patras to Athens*

For the first few hours the train pushed past  
blue-glass gulf water, then veered inland,  
into lemon groves. Waxy leaves swayed upward,  
lemons bobbing among the green.

They looked how I imagined they would,  
like overgrown bushes, overrun with yellow  
fruit that blossomed, breast-like, in clusters  
nestled in the leaves. Air smelled of citrus—  
lemons ripening, lemons swelling with water,  
lemons rotting on the ground beneath  
a lemon canopy. Dense with foliage,  
it was impossible to see beyond the first tree  
in the beginning of a lemon forest.

The train stopped in a clearing, and after a few minutes,  
strained forward again. It halted several times,  
in openings where scrub grass led out  
from the tracks to a sudden uprising  
of lemon trees. We were surrounded, contained,  
each clearing identical to the one before.  
Leaning out of the open, broken window

I could see only trees and the inert train  
disappearing into them. Then, slowly, faces,  
a handful people, emerged and boarded.

One mother held a small boy who  
was sucking on a piece of lemon  
as if it were sweet.



7. *Cairo to Aswan*

When I fell asleep, the Nile was on the left.  
I couldn't see it from my window,  
but sometime during the night, the river  
crossed over to follow us on the right.  
By dawn the Nile had narrowed, brought its edges  
closer together. The water cleared  
and no longer stank of river mud and gasoline.  
On the banks, tall crops of cattails gave way  
to measures of clover and sugarcane.  
Small wooden shelters shaded skinny donkeys  
munching on hay scattered at their feet.  
Copses that gave way to cabbage fields,  
crops gave way to brush, everything giving way to sand.  
Just yards from the water, everything green ended.  
Then the short distance to the train track,  
then mottled white dunes. We passed through  
valleys filled with vegetables and citrus trees,  
farms with irrigation, rows of sycamore and mulberry  
edging fields. But inevitably the Nile would narrow,  
the green would narrow, and crops huddled

at its edge. The sky in the river deepened  
its blue, the moon traveled and faded  
at its edge.

## Lowcountry, Daniel Island, South Carolina

Under the white arch of Highway 17,

high tide has lifted the sea oats, filled

the narrow channels with water. Wind

touches the eel grass, and it parts in curves,

showing silver instead of darkened mud.

A red-tailed hawk watches from her nest

on a high piling—what used to be a telephone pole,

now a nest—a traffic cone she must have dragged up

years ago juts out from the tangle of pine branches.

Over car exhaust, the mud smells of sweetgrass

and salt. Everything waits. This is how I remember

childhood: traffic over the long cement bridge,

tall green grasses part and wave,

rinse themselves, pause again.

## Tattoo

For a week I wouldn't let you touch it.

The skin, newly inked, raw, oozed with excess pigment and antibiotic cream. It healed into raised black ridges circling in on one another, a maze you would follow with one finger, tracing from center outward and back to center, the thin scabs tangled like wrought iron, or a wax seal.

Eventually, you left. In the shower now, looking back into the mirror, I can see it.

It surprises me to find no ridge. It's smooth, pigment blooming just under the skin—not a flower but a circle, and circles within.

## Souvenir Shopping, Monastiraki Square, Athens

In one of a thousand identical shops,  
crowded in the winding streets of the Plaka,  
vendors sing out to the passing crowd

of the higher quality of their statues,  
of the lower pricing of their linens, wink gleefully  
at this young American and her brother as we pass.

One of them pretends to believe we are newlyweds,  
laughs at the sudden red in my brother's face,  
invites us in, promises a good deal in marble

to fix his mistake. The shelves are narrow  
and we move sideways, surrounded by miniature  
mythological armies, unmoving, symmetrical.

The small figures gaze impassively, patrician,  
a hundred copies of Artemis on the ledge. I can buy her, if I wish:  
Artemis bathing, looking over one shoulder;

Artemis in black marble, the height of my hand; Artemis  
in alabaster, obscenely baring one breast;  
gray-marbled Artemis holds a small bow

against the folds of her dress. Turning, I see  
my brother peering at Zeus and Hermes, moving them  
around the shelf, facing off in rows, like chess figures.

Apollo tipped over, stares defeated at Zeus, until  
I pity him and turn away. On a new shelf, there are  
white figures with round faces, heavy bodies.

Labels say they're from the Cyclades, these smooth-faced  
statues, with no discernable eyes, no features but the general shape  
of graceful bodies. I see, among vacant male busts

representing knowledge or justice and fertility statues  
with entwined couples, a woman, kneeling, bending her head  
to look down at the line where her arms become her lap.

Her face is smooth, a featureless oval of white marble,  
with an elegant ridge—hair, if you can imagine it—  
flowing away from her face, down her back.

She is the Thinking Woman, ancient,  
and her shoulders look sorrowful, if stone can feel sorrow.  
I don't know if she is patient or strong. My fingers trace the line

of her cheeks, blank fall of her hair. I fall in love  
with her. At a cry, I turn back, see my brother  
holding out his hands. He has Pegasus,

alabaster, reared back, wings extended in feathered arcs.  
Pegasus in the moment before launching upward,  
coiled and shivering with momentum.

Tiny horse-nostrils flare out with imagined, inward breath.  
I follow the muscled legs, to my brother's careful, shaking hands,  
to the raised foreleg, cradled, and broken.

## Narcissus Lost

I used to think I was damaged:

I had a father who didn't love me enough,  
a mother, too much. It meant I was destined  
not to know balance, to withhold everything.

Wisteria vines bloom for a single week in spring,  
clusters of lilac-blue flowers hanging like grapes.  
Unchecked, they will suffocate a tree, bring it down  
in a handful of years. As a child, I played  
in the vines, tucked against a pine tree,  
ten feet off the ground. I liked the purple, the too-sweet  
smell, liked feeling alone and beautiful.

Each spring, before I grew afraid of falling,  
my mother would find me there,  
told me to come down when I was ready.



## Narcissus Found

The poem you would have me write  
would be elegant and ornate, and about you.  
Or by not being about you, it would be about your absence.  
You'd want to be hidden: the azaleas by my door  
  
would dip heavily in the same gesture your shoulders made.  
Your scent—sandalwood or maybe cedar—  
would linger in every room of the house. It would be  
your face looking back at me when I glance in the mirror. And the eyes.  
  
Leaving you there, behind the silvered glass,  
your eyes follow me. My mouth opens  
your mouth, my face turns your face away. Your hand rises  
  
to your mouth, each time I touch my lips,  
feel the soft, forgiving skin. You smile at me.  
See, I raise my hand now, and you reach for me.

## Interstate 77 South, After Passing Charlotte

Another flat mile, pine trees crowding from the road  
to a navy sky—my mother had been driving  
for six hours, taking us home.

There was no moon and nothing on the radio.

Summertime, and above us, lightning  
passed lazily from one cloud to another.

Each time I remember this, she looks younger.

I look younger. She was wearing my favorite ring,

the pale blue star sapphire she lost once, and that I found  
for her, not in the house or the car, but in the tomato bed.

You can only see the star in direct sunlight, so  
the ring was muted, like a pearl on her finger.

## Witch's Seat, Loughcrew Cairns, Ireland

*Collectively, the hills are known as "Sliabh na Caillighe,"  
or the "Mountain of the Witch."*

A rectangular stone set into the hillside,  
as high as my chest—it must have weighed  
in the thousands of pounds—with a seat  
worn into the top. Not carved or cut,  
  
but chafed until the center smoothed  
downward, almost shone. Sitting there,  
my feet dangled over the edge, I could see  
green squares of barley farms, neatly divided  
  
over each hill. I wondered how many women  
must have sat here, not those Druid-like  
women with night-colored cloaks and unwashed hair,  
not beautiful and young, but townswomen,

bent and weathered, who didn't need to speak  
as they climbed, came for centuries and eventually  
left this worn, Mesolithic stone, its face carved  
with shallow concentric circles, cups, and stars.

No mystery and ritual, no conspiracy, just those  
who hiked up a hill, found this massive stone  
inviting, the feminine inner curve.

I see her clearly, a young woman—or perhaps

a woman who's been married for longer  
than she hasn't—barn coat tugged firmly  
around her, wind brisk on the hill. The first shock  
of cold stone, then its warmth as she settles,

looks back over her land, her house.

What does she see? A gust of wind loosens  
her dark hair, and she catches the strands, tucks them  
behind an ear. She can see for miles.

## In Search of Lost Time

She forgets the little things now, checks  
the newspaper every few seconds to reassure herself  
of the date, walks to the mailbox and back to the house,  
letters on the kitchen table.

Everything reminds her of home: oak trees  
leading up a dirt path to the house, smell of honey-suckle  
and something wet from the earth—moss, maybe,  
or just summer's humidity.

She seems smaller each visit, perched obediently  
on the sun-porch sofa, pats my shoulder as I lean down  
to kiss her. She always asks if I'm happy;  
I always say yes.

Her last of eight sisters died in February, and since then  
she has talked about the farm. Growing up in the country  
meant that there was always company, cousins  
from the city. She and her sisters

took them riding. They'd circle out from the barn  
to the edge of the Rappahannock, then through fields with even rows  
of cucumbers. They'd had to stop several times to help  
cousins who slipped or fell, couldn't manage even a pony.

Each time she reaches this part of the story  
her voice changes, comes from a different part of her chest.  
I see her, boyish, on the chestnut Cerberus: impatient,  
bursting forward, abandoning them all for the river.

## Tornado Warning

You didn't need the radio  
to tell you that—the sky was enough.

Outside the rain stopped,  
nothing moved in green-tinted light.

The air felt like one slow inhale,  
holding, not breathing out yet.

It was difficult to wait.

You never anticipated that  
sometimes the worst happens.

You knew when your parents  
stopped loving each other,  
and when your grandfather  
began getting lost inside himself.

His body had become tentative.

Your grandmother broke  
the leaded crystal vase, the one  
her brother, now dead, had given them  
for their wedding. She dropped it,

rinsing it in the granite sink for  
the hyacinth she clipped  
from the garden. She never said  
if she had cried, or just swept  
the larger pieces into a box.  
She had to keep him from seeing.  
You knew you had no right  
to grieve until you had something  
broken to grieve over.



