

## ABSTRACT

Title of Thesis: NEW BODIES MOVE THROUGH LEAVES  
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The poems in this collection navigate the relationship between place and memory, exploring the ways in which formative experiences of irrevocable loss resonate across landscapes. Relying on observation in the presence of the unknown, these poems experiment with forms to reflect on our tenuous connections to this world and our own memories.

NEW BODIES MOVE THROUGH LEAVES

by

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I

## Hospice

*—for WK*

Coyotes built their den beneath  
the house those months our father's back

withered to bone. Mother found skulls

of ruined birds, discovered tracks  
between the yielding stones and knew

the pair was soon expecting spring,

one hunting, one hidden. I  
remember soaking rags, the sting

of sharp ammonia in our throats

as Mother breathed the darkness out—  
and then waited for them to leave,

and then waited for the without.

## In the Greenhouse

you told me what the Doctors had said.

We'd decided to plant cherry tomatoes  
again and now were suffocating—

so many ripened hearts spilling

onto our shoulders, filling the air  
with cancer. You would have been

pinching a few at once off the vine

any other day, teaching me  
how to have patience, to wait

until the smallest twist would loosen their

hold on life. I didn't want to hear it.  
When you hugged me, the glasses

in your shirt pocket cracked

against my cheek. I tried to keep that moment  
from ending, wishing it was someone

else's greenhouse that'd been chosen.

## The Pine Barrens

Spontaneous drive through a million acres  
of pygmy pitch pines, white cedars, pink  
orchids that looked like lungs  
sprouting out of the silt, grasses and sedges

I had no name for as I watched  
from the back seat, my brother  
buckled in next to me, teething  
the rounded knitted nubs of his blanket,

my mother applying sunscreen every  
time we stopped to stretch, my father  
pretending to fall asleep  
at the wheel, swerving over

broken yellow lines on the long empty road  
for our delight, ignoring  
a gnawing of something unlike hunger,  
eating nothing.

It would be hours before we  
emerged from the undisturbed woods,  
learning the isolating work  
of navigation in a pre-modern world,

swathes of peeling needleless trees  
reappearing along the route  
like an omen. We thought we had more time—  
it was late summer, the days felt impossibly

full of light. It must not have been long  
after that—

## Rootbound

The sage is strangling itself  
on the windowsill  
and there's nothing

I'm willing to do.  
Stems too thin to stand,  
I've left them coiling

their velvet-eared leaves  
on the black dirt,  
listening to their own roots

choke up at the hint  
of cloudless day—  
the painful certainty of sun

though dying; the need  
to keep eating, receiving  
as much as the body

allows, to keep washing  
your hair every morning  
though it's clogging

the drain—falling in fingerfuls  
the dark threads  
once so rooted

to your head  
I could grip them  
without fear of falling off

your shoulders.

1:11 p.m.

end of february, friday, after months  
of dark winter, surviving christmas

and the new year leafless and bone-  
thin, finally a few roots stirring

beneath the frozen earth, shards  
of light carving out the elements

while the bell rings. I pass around  
invitations to my birthday.

we've already bought the balloons  
and hula hoops. my mother

comes for me hours after it's  
over—the pastor there and gone,

the hospice nurse, who'd remembered  
to call the time, now at home

watching my brother. I walk  
out of the gymnasium: sparrows

aligned in perfect numbness  
on the telephone wire, this cold

bright sun splintering off  
each shining icicle and molecule

of dew in the glimmering fields,  
every tree bent, weeping.

## Elegy After Adoption

Then the trees start dying,  
let drop their terminally purple  
leaves on the overturned dirt—

maple seeds spinning to rot,  
red oaks shaking at the root,  
whole rows of silvered bark

along the fields you and my mother  
grew out of weeds, the ancient  
lindens entwined beside the barn

where your truck still waits  
in a thousand pieces you kept  
meaning to put back together,

and even the tall elm, the one  
outside my bedroom window when  
some summer I barely remember

I relearned your name by carving  
D-A-D into each gnarl  
of wood while you worked

for several days tying knots  
to make me a real swing, smoothing  
your hands over the rough rope,

lassoing the limb above, and pulling  
with a strength I haven't seen since  
so the branch may break on you first.

## Portrait of My Mother

Washing ash off the windowsill,  
she wolfishly eats honey

out of last year's jar. She's hungry  
no matter how many handfuls

of Queen Anne's Lace across  
the field are about to bloom.

Gathering stones, gathering his tools  
turned to rust in the grass,

she keeps busy. The body is gone.  
His parents come to help

make arrangements. Something like  
anger seeps through the rafters, bats

keep swooping down the unlit chimney,  
snakes nest in the basement.

Which maples does she need  
to uproot in the valley?

Finches molt into gold  
between brambles of forsythia

just as she knew they would,  
though it still seems unreal.

March makes cold shadows  
and the river is higher than ever.

Alone with us again, she follows  
any source of light for answers: bitter

wind on slopes up the mountain,  
excavation dust in her hair,

forty-eight more years of grief  
left. Cloud-break, then—

Sun.  
She did all she could to prepare.

## Great Eastern Brood

The summer after you died,  
cicada casings covered

the ground beneath trees,  
shells shed and forgotten,

light and brittle  
against the black bark.

We found a husk clinging  
to the trunk of an oak—

legs left hooked  
on snarled wood, old skin split

where the wings would be.  
    We heard overhead

new bodies move through leaves.

II

## Fairview Lake

Several busloads brought us there  
from each district across the county.  
Ours kicked up dirt at the gate

and backed over a snapping turtle.  
The boys bent close enough to touch it,  
the trees were bursting with applause—

red-orange, ochre, burnt umber—  
the lake gleamed like a clean plate,  
and I could hardly get a word in.

Cabin Nine was full of skinny, pretty  
girls I didn't know yet. They spilled  
nail polish onto their mattresses,

mascara, brushes, tubes of cherry-  
flavored lip gloss, tampons, razors.  
One asked if I had a nickname

that was easier to remember. I  
unrolled the old sleeping bag my mother  
had found in the attic that smelled

like moth balls and molasses.  
A praying mantis turned its head  
in the dry grass, I could almost

hear it—rain coming down the mountain.  
That night we roasted two hundred  
marshmallows around the fire pit

and the chaperones tried to teach us  
to sing in unison. They carried pails  
of water in the silver moonlight

to pour over the ashes. It reminded me  
of something I'd done recently,  
but it was hard to know who'd listen

to that story—our teeth began  
glowing and even in the semi-darkness  
there was no way to tell us apart.

## Mendocino

She warns me not to fully trust the ground  
along the headlands where we're walking now.  
The grass is mostly safe, though some misjudge  
a net of ice plant's thickly-knotted roots  
constructing false footing that creeps across  
the cliff side, flashing on this bright day.  
My friend says there's nothing I can do,  
my brother fast unraveling three thousand  
miles away. I know it's not enough to want  
to stay here. There's an iron chain buried  
from old shipping days when passengers slid  
to vessels on open air lifts, women too,  
though standing was considered showing off.  
We roll our sleeves up, spit on palms for grip,  
and test the weight, still sunken deep in sand.  
It will not budge. Just then my friend sees them—  
the puffs much whiter than sun-flare across  
water and longer than our human sighs—  
the bellows from those prehistoric creatures  
coming up for air beside this ledge  
of country, farther than I've ever been.

## Oblivion

My brother wanted to keep  
    going down the narrow  
  
side trail we'd discovered  
    by mistake in the high heat  
  
of mid-summer, so we left  
    the tow path, nosed  
  
our bikes through vines  
    and ferns, weeds  
  
the size of our heads  
    shimmering with dust  
  
in the hazy green light.  
    With every turn I wondered  
  
if we'd gone too far.  
    It wasn't  
  
until we burst into  
    a clearing, the ivy  
  
all around us,  
    that we noticed how  
  
changed we'd become.

## New Jersey, November

It's been dark for hours.  
I wait at the only red light in Baptistown  
after a brief visit with friends.

We'd talked on the screened-in porch  
while the tall cattails  
made a hushing sound around us.

Someone said those gravestones  
across the street needed  
fixing up. After two recent sightings,

bear season's open. They call it  
"harvesting." Stirred by three days' rain,  
nightcrawlers spill onto the asphalt,

luminous in the headlights.  
The purple flags hang above  
the ambulance bay

of the rescue squad building  
like they had for my father—  
a simple gesture I'll never forget.

## Girlhood Guilt

I didn't hear her come in—

I stood at the sink, reciting  
the alphabet, turning my

hands under the water.

It was flu season and  
my father was very strict

about that kind of thing,

insisting the heat would  
burn off germs. At home

he'd turn on all the faucets

and test the temperature  
with his thumb. He thought I was

lying, trying to stay out of trouble.

Maybe this girl  
thought so too. She watched

through the mirror until

I noticed her—the new student  
we were supposed

to be nice to. She asked

how old I was and I told her  
I knew she lived in the brown house

by the post office, its soggy lawn

littered with broken wheels.  
She moved so fast—

grabbed a fist of hair

from my head and threw it  
in the sink—dared me

to tell someone, but I didn't  
feel anything. The faucet was still  
running, the steam fogging  
the mirror, and I only thought  
of my father, how I could have  
tricked him then.

## Elegy

### I. Grandmother's Kitchen

Nothing tastes good to her  
except cigarettes and cartons

of vanilla ice cream. She smokes  
by the window—ash in a potted plant

dead from the waist up, ash  
in a crystal dish on stacks of old

newspapers—her fingernails painted  
Midnight Blue and long enough

for clusters of rhinestone constellations,  
hair in pin curls as when she was

a girl, loose skin on her thin neck,  
hollow cough at the end of a breath

that's warned her lungs for years.  
She tells me not to stand so close.

### II. Irene 1922-1999

Monday of a long weekend,  
a school holiday, we were planning  
to visit old friends in the city.

The phone call, the shrill  
ring from its hook on the wall—  
my mother must have known,

winding the cord around her  
middle and index fingers, knitting  
an infinite loop.

The whole time  
she shuttled back and forth between  
the hospital and home, my mother

had listened to Andrea Bocelli's  
*Romanza*, rehearsing  
what to say to her mother,

if she could still hear it. *Forgive us*  
*our trespasses*, the feeding tube,  
the ventilator's unrelenting whirl.

I wish I remembered more  
than a few glimpses of her life  
in the last millennium—the way

my grandmother had shimmied  
down the path when she came to visit  
that summer, how she'd listened

to everything I said by the big swing,  
lighting another cigarette, exhaling  
toward the blue woods...

## Cowbird | Birth Father

Too large for the wrens' nest,  
they keep it anyway. Brood

parasite, it grows twice as fast  
as the others, crowding them

out of the tree, its beak always  
open, ready to receive any offering.

It has evolved to do this—  
driven by unforgiving

hunger, no time to build and  
rebuild its own bed of sticks,

the brown-headed cowbird  
abandons its egg

anywhere that will keep a stone warm.  
Often you can see a few

boldly stealing seed  
from the feeder early morning.

I was just sitting here, watching  
from my mother's kitchen,

and suddenly thought of him.

Jordan, MN

The smell of wild rice simmering in milk  
still drifting through the house  
this mid-morning in early May—  
everything's quiet. They must be resting.

I wear the red sweater they'd sent  
one birthday when I was a teenager,  
and find the dog listening at the stairs.  
Her claws click across the hardwood.

I eat an underripe plum  
and wonder where to put the pit.  
I've been hoping I would recognize  
anyone in these old photographs

they've shown while filling me in  
on our history. The back door's locked  
when I try it, so the dog follows me  
around front toward the room

they built in the beginning, where  
they'd raised the first four children  
and where the Virgin Mary  
had visited my grandmother.

Outside, hollow light  
in the fields—the five horses,  
fourteen sheep, dozens of hens and hounds  
long dead—now only Chloe, the last

Labrador limping through spiderwebs  
and leaves, and me, here  
for the first time I can remember.  
My mother didn't talk about them

after he left, and I was a baby.  
I think of my great-grandmother's  
wedding dress—the simple cotton shift  
browning around the lace-trimmed neckline,

unfolded for me yesterday.  
I think of her threading loops through  
the buttonholes in the wilderness  
of Minnesota with its cold coyotes

and the blue-green boughs  
of cloud-like white pines.  
There's no place in my mind  
to lay this landscape over—

not the few late-blooming  
tulips, nor the torn barn where Chloe  
has her nose in the dandelions,  
not the wild ferns at the foot

of the woods, not each  
deciduous tree my grandfather  
knows by bark, as he knows  
which dogwoods will turn up pink.

## This Week

M— writes a poem about *weird things*:  
blue caterpillars, a pink ladybug tangoing  
alone, birds eating Popeyes, a boy

making grandmother pie, the kitchen, an onion,  
an owl. She tells me her birthday was  
just an ordinary day. Now she is ten.

I go Tuesday afternoons to read  
with her. This week she says, whatever's in  
my head is telling me I want to get educated.

She claims that sometimes she becomes  
hypnotized by her own hair. For this month's  
historical book report she wants to be the Queen.

When I laugh he laughs, when he laughs  
I laugh, she says about her cousin,  
who moved out in August. She's been

thinking about *gloomy things*, like insects,  
like a tarantula, which is not an insect, eating  
blueberries. At school they call her Elizabeth

and she prefers it. It's not good to pretend  
to be sick because someday it might happen,  
so don't fool around. In Peru, she

says, an earthquake fell upon me...  
I grabbed my purse, my shoes, and three leaps  
I'm at the door. She shows me

around the airplane she's made:  
separate compartments with handles  
going nowhere, how the luggage only fits

in the bathroom, how one suitcase  
doesn't even open, so the girl will  
have to buy clothes when she gets there.

We wait in line to board and M— gives  
the boy the bags to carry, because boys  
do everything for you. This is all real life,

we've seen it. She asks why we dream,  
why they're pictures and if it's like being  
dead. At some point in the poem

Mrs. Z— walks through the door with  
an alphabetical look on her face. Her mind  
will always be hula-hooping. M— likes a mess

to know where everything is. It's  
tradition to give the rat your baby teeth  
so they will grow back unchippable.

She wants to keep these gifts, though it's said  
that if a child's awake too late,  
the owl will come and eat her.

## Song

I'll grow them outside,  
two opal eyes. This house  
will cause seventy  
or more sleepless nights.

You'll forget everything I said  
and tell me your brain is  
too crowded. The wind  
drags its fingers through

this weedy field. I have  
a sound planted here, I put those  
cloud stories in your head.  
A little bee flies

up my sleeve. There are seeds  
stuck in our teeth. On Wednesdays  
when it's cloudy, we seek  
the grayest trees. Show me

that forgotten craft, give  
me your loudest laugh.  
You have a big artichoke heart  
wrapped in mighty leaves.

### III

## One Night

we cleaned the kitchen, rinsed  
the sink with bleach, rid the refrigerator  
of take-out containers, reapplied duct tape  
to cracks where cockroaches  
kept coming through, pulled the stove out  
to reach those hidden corners,  
and scrubbed the linoleum for the first time

since you came back. We hardly  
said a word to one another, whirling  
around the tiny space in the semi-dark  
like those magnets when, as a child—still  
fascinated by the idea of invisible order  
and unseen force (so long as I felt it)—  
I'd failed to push the same poles together.

## Québec, July

By the third day we'd run out of things to do  
inside the walls of the old city. We'd circled

the cobblestone streets of the Place-Royale  
in full sunshine, watched a woman pose

her Bichons in front of the Notre-Dame  
des Victoires, passed the glassmaker's

searing workroom, two ovens burning,  
teal patina melting off rooftops, fresh green

paint on each window frame of the new  
department store, a parking garage below

a stretch of tufted wheat, the Breakneck  
Steps to the lower town, the glistening

river beyond. It was a month before  
your classes began in Japan. You read

my palm beside the cannons. I made  
us come here, twelve hours north

through a town called Stillwater  
and a blinding hailstorm that dissolved

before our eyes. Everyone seemed  
just like us, visiting in pairs to listen

for the metallic echo of horse shoes  
on stone. All along the Terrace Dufferin

we stopped to breathe in the roiling horizon.  
We didn't know what ruins lay beneath us.

We didn't even look.

## Endless Avenues

Spring evening in the city. A glossy pink  
worm creeps across the sidewalk

and the air reeks of fallen blossoms  
mottled and soggy. I've stopped counting

the days. The ginkgo trees are furiously green  
and dripping after a light rainfall. It feels terrible

to imagine them gold again in a few months,  
but I can't resist. Nothing looks the same

as when you were here. Even the dogs  
have stopped barking at each other

and there are all these new mothers  
smoothing their babies' peachy heads.

I haven't always needed to concentrate  
on breathing. The light turned before I could

capture it spilling over townhouse rooftops.  
Now blue hour settles over all of us

and I'll stay out as late as I want.  
No one's expecting me.

## Kudoyama

The first day we walk down narrow streets—  
grates in the pavement for months of flood,  
most of the signs are hand-painted, and we see  
where ink dried before brush strokes ended.

We pass a shrine and three blue buildings.  
Clay pots sit drying, dogs look up from their huts,  
homes arrange themselves in rows, sloped  
roofs adjoining. In an alley barely wide

enough for our shoulders, we find a cactus  
pink and curled like an octopus. Every garden  
has bamboo shoots holding heavy, reaching  
limbs of pines. *Tanukis* at the front door bring luck

to aging families inside. The only people who speak  
to us are children. They want to know my name  
and you explain it isn't a sound they can make.  
I say the phrase you taught me—*sumimasen*

*I'm sorry*—when I'd rather say their river  
is the same color as the one I left yesterday,  
the gray sky swallowed into blue. Above us,  
herons circle the water, and I tell you it's the weather

that makes me walk slower, though I'm thinking of the birds  
in my father's photos, long legs and beaks reflected, wings  
seemingly never ending. There are no fish  
without waiting. I make a mistake when we break

for food. The way I've placed my chopsticks is reserved  
for funerals, points down in the rice bowl. We don't laugh,  
perhaps I'm not forgiven, and I sit with my hands  
on my cheeks until we leave. Earlier, I woke to you

breathing, melting snow on the mountains in the distance,  
a barren cherry tree. I could tell you sleep well without me.  
But still I thought this was all I would need—I thought the sound  
of a train passing town would be less lonely beside another body.

## Osaka

After the castle tour—  
the many displays

of old armor with lacquered  
leather scales, panels

of thinly painted, snow-coated  
mountains, heron

gilded on the roof—  
you lead us

through plum blossoms,  
a whole grove, limbs

of tight blooms nettling  
the early season.

Most have opened  
their flushed pink faces—

pollen-tipped filaments  
fling themselves greedily

as I reach for you.  
Today is my birthday.

I've come all this way  
to see you.

We stop at a tree  
still struggling

to shed winter, heartwood  
worn as a shield, boughs

like black swords,  
scabbards of bundled petals.

I hesitate—my core  
is iron-licked. Inside

your fists, grain upon grain  
of gold. I forgot

we had buried this there.

## Arashiyama

We're visiting your family's friends  
on the outskirts of Kyoto,  
and we're offered slippers at the door.

They've lived here since the wife  
started missing her mother.  
I decline tea, though she's boiling

more water. They want to take us  
to the bamboo forest at the end of town,  
and I'm tired after three days

traveling with your parents. In places  
like Arashiyama—shrines tucked inside  
a grove—sometimes I can't tell

what's a dream. Was this morning  
another walk around a garden?  
Stone paths arriving at dropped

red camellias, everything arranged.  
The andromeda wept handfuls  
of white bells. Inside the temple

were one thousand statues  
carved from cypress trees, each  
with forty-two arms, all dusted

in gold leaf. Now your mother  
tells the story of her last visit  
to the forest—seven months

pregnant and along the steep paths  
bamboo stalks swayed together  
like a zealous choir. A hiss rose

up to the leafed peak. We joke  
this is why you keep coming back,  
as if the cells that built you

remembered the ancient breeze.  
The wife pours water from a green pot  
and fills my cup.

## Spring Haibun

We brave a mile of rain for bean burgers from the new market where you, forgetting to translate, introduce me to a co-worker in Japanese.

You get hot coffee from the vending machine.

A fisherman's rubber suit with mud up to the knees hangs from a hook outside.

I see your students in town, recognize your name in their mouths, so I wave.

The deer in Nara Park bow back, nudge us for food and nibble our fists when we run out.

You get ice cream from the vending machine.

All at once, plum blossoms in bloom on my birthday.

The children have a song and foot-stomping dance about the bear. Girls in pink, boys in blue uniforms as they gallop around the room.

There are several places to buy keychains of plastic teeth in Osaka.

We don wild red wigs in a boutique with dolls that have wings for arms.

Santa figurines lounge on yellow moons as decoration on a chain link fence.

We sleep at the Net Café. A sign reads: BEER SANDWITCH SCORN CAKE.

Some melons cost \$137.

I've learned to say *gochisousama deshita* – *that was delicious*.

I've learned what your face looks like when you're talking about me.

In the temple garden, we rest near a wet maple and a Weeping Peach.

The number 4 means death.

We visit a museum where the artwork is puddles of water on a lunar surface. A beating heart in a dark room.

I was dreaming of a heavy, heavy rainfall, is what our friend said before I left to be with you.

Our clothes take two days to dry on your concrete balcony.

A little dog trots by wearing a hat with tiny, koi-shaped windsocks.

We've become regulars at the restaurant across the river. I'll miss the smooth jazz they play in the bathrooms and the heated seats.

On our walk back to your apartment, we witness cats fighting on someone's driveway, which is just a pair of loud yowls.

The abandoned pachinko parlor looms past a field of purple deadnettles.

You're the only person I've talked to for months.

We ride the cable car to the top of the mountain, and I look for monkeys among the early green. You say they can feel when to leave.

The graveyard is full of giant trees numbered 1 – 598.

Tonight, the neighbor's bushes catch fire and you dream we're having a party, celebrating my last day.

I wish we could start  
over—unbreak the flowers  
on the cherry trees.

## Aquarium

The whale shark dies  
while I'm dreaming of smog adrift  
seven thousand miles away,

and you're nodding good evening  
to people on the street, wisteria  
wilting in violet knots along the tree line

beside the school. I didn't think  
it'd be this hard to remember  
to forget you.

That last weekend  
we traveled two hours from the valley,  
persimmon trees staggering up

the mountains. We sat beside a man  
asleep in a creased suit. In Osaka  
the sky unfurled from the port—

clouds the thinnest wisps swam by.  
We didn't see the nimbus haze  
gathering beyond the bay.

You lent me yen to tour the aquarium,  
its core a bowl of Pacific Ocean.  
In the blue light, we suspended

our worries. A stingray smoothed  
its body over the glass between  
us. Past a swirling group of silver fish,

the mammoth whale shark—  
pattern on its back dim as stars  
of a polluted city—spiraled to the top

of its enclosure. It found  
no answers. Curling in, again  
it tried drowning.

## Homecoming

All this should be so familiar—  
the hollyhocks, the fishhooks,  
the cardinal's daily ritual  
throwing himself against the window pane  
over and over, chives going wild  
in the backyard—I lost  
your recipe on the way back,  
could you send it?  
Things are heating up.  
It hurts how blue the sky is.  
My mother came home  
with a snake skin as long  
as she is tall. I'm trying  
to stay busy, spelling words  
for my brother: Helianthus, synchronized,  
mammoth—while we slice  
giant onions from the garden, overripe  
tomatoes as big as our hearts.  
Mother and I wiped the mailbox  
clean of spiders. The dogs  
kept tugging their leashes toward  
the hunting grounds behind the house.  
Mayflies fill the ditches.  
I started at the restaurant again,  
walking up and down blue stairs  
repeatedly. I have small nicks on  
my fingers from wine bottle wrappers.  
April says it gets easier, but I know  
she's talking about the stairs.  
Yesterday friends visited,  
and we sprawled under the dark  
purple plum trees—the red underleaf  
flashing in the breeze.  
For nearly ten minutes  
we listened as a hundred motorcycles  
pealed past us, you  
wouldn't have believed it—

## Spring Tanka

I least expected  
  snow today— but here it is  
floating from the high  
  peaks of the graying mountains,  
and also, a letter from you.

## The Boat

After lunch we went down to the lake.  
Our families had plenty to talk about—  
we hardly had to be there, pulling  
berries from the raw-edged bushes.

Your father unlocked the boat house  
they shared with the neighbors  
and swept webs off the life-vests.  
The footbridge was flooded

from the hurricane. A dragonfly  
dried its body on a bur-reed  
and it reminded me  
of what the Reverend had said

at my father's funeral  
about the transformation into  
something with wings, how it can  
never again return to the water.

All across the lake lilies were blooming.  
My mother and brother both wanted  
to see the other shore,  
so you took them.

Every now and then  
the weeds underneath caused  
a stillness that the three of you  
broke with your oars. As soon as

the boat passed behind the island  
I wondered why I'd let you go—  
the ones I love most  
disappearing...

## Retrospect

I was chasing wild geese from the thawing  
fields, the same pairs appearing

every February, while you were hailing taxis  
to corners of slick dark cement

among Dalmatian-walking mothers  
on the Upper East Side. Were we ever

really children? We were always  
alone. While you were mapping paths

through Central Park, the Met, the many  
delicatessens and landmark skyscrapers—

your own multiverse on the surface of this earth—  
I began tapping sap from the few syrupy

pinets, imagining a substance suitable  
for chewing, bored in the evergreen

woods. There was no one yet to forgive  
or abandon, nothing of regret

at wasting good hours with you  
over something as trivial as speeding off

into your thicketed city routine  
before taking me with you. Of course

you came back, though I'm certain now  
that you were a boy of underground trains,

learning the hurried, angled jaunt of crowds  
as dispassionate as clocks, while I was unseen

in the grasses, dreaming of combing  
my wriggling fingers through cumulus clouds,

luxuriating in the rough particles.