

# THE FALL OF 1990

Depending on whose word  
you trust, the rain  
was either tapering off

or coming down so hard  
it sounded like fruit  
on the roof of our car.

In one version  
it took us an hour  
to find a parking spot.

In the other  
we circled the block  
once and there

it was—waiting  
right out front.  
*We loved Boston,*

*we were just ready  
for a change.  
Or: We had a month*

*to settle up  
and leave.*

We left

any way you tell it—  
omens everywhere  
or signs of mercy,

even light,  
as we pulled up,  
got out, stood

like a family  
in the city's palm.  
We were a family—

my father held  
my sister's hand  
and I bobbed

like a buoy  
in my mother's arms.

# BILLS

I remember when the lights  
used to go out. The sun  
untangling itself

like a shoelace  
above the trees  
and my father

running late.  
I remember the money  
vanishing but not

where I'd kept it—  
the black heels  
of the eviction lady,

my mother's maiden name  
in her mouth.

# SCHOOL NIGHTS

From one couch  
to another, she used to tell him

*Pick on someone else tonight  
because I'm not going to be*

*your punching bag—*  
the living room

erupting in laughter,  
of all things,

then muted  
by tears she was tired

of having to shed  
while Vanna White glittered

in the night's sequined gown  
and a bank of consonants

and vowels waited  
to be touched.

# INITIATION

I'd just learned to swim  
when he taught me  
to float face down  
in the pool. The idea  
was to hold my breath  
and relax, limb to limb,  
until someone, ideally  
my mother, looked  
up from their weight  
loss magazine  
in horror. Four or five,  
I studied him  
first, grinned  
until his body  
looked like a leaf  
minding its own  
finished business.  
At the time, I didn't  
know he wanted  
to die. The allure  
of the ocean not  
what it spit back out  
but what it kept.

He was so proud  
when I did  
as I was told,  
coming up  
for air only after  
my mother felt  
like she'd slipped  
down a flight  
of stairs, and he stood  
in the oversized  
t-shirt he wore  
to hide his stomach,  
beaming like we  
finally had something  
in common.