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Climate Change

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CLIMATE CHANGE

by

TAYLOR BYAS

ADAM VINES, COMMITTEE CHAIR
KERRY MADDEN-LUNSFORD
LAUREN SLAUGHTER

A THESIS

Submitted to the graduate faculty of The University of Alabama at Birmingham,
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts

BIRMINGHAM, ALABAMA

2019

CLIMATE CHANGE

TAYLOR BYAS

ENGLISH

ABSTRACT

The poems in this thesis function on two different levels. On one level, they explore the similarities and differences between Chicago and Birmingham, the two places in which I have spent most of my life. On another level, these poems attempt to reconcile the differences between my younger and older selves, both of which have existed in environments fraught with social and political tensions.

The first half of this collection explores Chicago and more closely examines my ancestry and family history. The poems in this section also endeavor to deconstruct stereotypes about Chicago and to depict the city as a place in which love, loss, and innocence can coexist. To bring this section to life, I incorporate the voices of my grandparents and my mother into some of the poems.

The second half of the collection looks at my daily confrontations with Alabama's complicated history. These poems are inspired heavily by the works of William Christenberry, whose haunting photographs of Alabama seem to confront its past. As a result, the poems in this section take a step beyond a lived reality and attempt to reimagine Alabama in its past, present, and future.

As a whole, this collection of poems comments on my existence as a black woman in two distinct environments, highlighting the role in which geographical location plays in my everyday interactions.

Keywords: poetry, Chicago, Birmingham, Alabama, race, ancestry

DEDICATION

For Jared and Alexis

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CHICAGO

Tender-headed

I resume
my Saturday night post
between stretchmarks,
shoulders caught
between chestnut thighs
as grandma greases my scalp.
She carmines the nape of my
neck with her rat-tail comb,
the one with gaps where
my naps wrestled and won.

The coffee table muddles
with jars of gel and
rubber bands that welted
her thumbs when they
snapped, my backside numb
on the living room
carpet, dahlia fibers
honeycombing my skin
through my oversized tee.

Be still now, and I strain
against her grip on my roots,
chawing tongue to check my
mewls, focusing
on the click of her short
nails colliding as she plaits
piece over piece.

She hums *For Your Glory*,
parts my hair into sections
gridding out old city streets
and rows of cotton;
I wonder if she braids my hair
for the pastor's approval
or God's – they'd never say.

The Gathering Place – Grandma’s House

I.

Her black piano
keys gummed up from our sticky
fingers, and after
long, the notes came delayed and
untuned. So she stopped playing.

Her bedsheets aqua
blue, a body of satin
shared with her swollen
limbs. We slept curled on our sides—
a tight line of small cashews.

Her teal tub with white
streaks. My teenage salt dried down
the sides, rimmed the jet
holes like a margarita glass—
toes and heel cast in the tub.

The upstairs bedroom
we all owned once, the Barbie
sheets that unsexed me
in puberty, the dazzling doll
eyes that watched me touch myself.

II.

The gossip spills like
gravy on Christmas linens—
elbow nudges, quick
under-the-table kicking
when the grown folks say too much.

The older cousins
disappear to smoke weed down
by the park, return
smelling like glove-box car spray
and spearmint, loose-limbed, loose-lipped.

You still with that boy?
pairs nicely with Chardonnay.
The aunt on her third
marriage says *the key is sex*,
lifts her glass, toasts to no one.

My grandma absolves
our sins with forehead kisses
and pound cake. *You my
child, even though you really
aren't*, she tells me. *You mine*.

Sunday Service

“The Blood Still Works” stampedes throughout the nave,
and once the organ player’s shoulders seize
with song, the spirit hits the pews in waves.
I catch the loosening necks, the mouths’ new ease

in moving before they start to speak in tongues;
I move my lips, pretend to be saved. Right next
to me, my grandma starts to convulse—the drums
of the band, a puppet master or a hex—

and ushers in white surround her, lock their hands
to keep her in. The preacher’s sermon lilts
into a screech, his sinners flutter fans
like mosquito wings, and with his eyes he guilts

me into praying hands. I repent for things
I’ve yet to do. They jerk to tambourines.

In the Winter, God Shows Off

His skyscrapers watch the city; beams
of white resteel prismatic spires and dust
Chicago's shoreline. Scabs of ice encrust
backyards and stop signs. He repaints the Bean
in watercolor pearl, its top half preened
in tufted ice, the lower half untouched
by snowflakes. In its curve I melt, face slushed
in thawing metal. My hands and frost convene

in fingerprinted glass. In this careened quotation,
I think I catch him, etching plans of qubits
and columns, plotting where the snow should bowl
through Navy Pier. He draws this transformation
in blueprints, calculates the splay of lucid
crystals. Uncolored flecks roll out in scrolls.

Trump Card

Past 1:00 AM my father squats against
the kitchen doorway, his wall-eyed legs wide enough
to invite my mother in and ask her name. His hand
presses into the gap between her jeans and

crop top, the swale of her spine deepening as she
bows backward in a soft bellow, as if to move
closer and farther away all at once. She lets him
keep her there, a sultry haze of tobacco on

breath, his teeth glistening like the crannied
volume knob in his gold Coupe de Ville
when he asks if she wants to play spades.

In the living room, high schoolers
pretend to be adults, nursing Mad Dog
in whiskey glasses, dancing
around the black folding table housing

cards and ashtrays in each corner. A few tricks in,
a wisp of her merlot cupid's bow
ganders over the top of her splayed hand.
Instead of counting cards, he stipples her lips

in his mind, repainting them to a frozen
hello with tongue tasting teeth, comparing
the red to the diamonded jack that leads while
she warns against reneging with a wink. She

feels him shrink behind his cards' crosshatching,
retracting from her cool as if he sensed her
flushing him out, waiting for him to break spades,
wondering if he was the right partner for the game.

Disciplinarian

I.

In the closet, racked in line for picking, belts
molder and shed in leather scabs; in hand,
they crack like reins. On their legs and backs, the brand
of a coachman shows itself as the tallied welts
my grandfather counted out. Every pelt
is really punctuation, pauses that land
between the beats—*I ain't gon tell you again.*
My mother got it worse than I did, felt

the uncoiling of strap and breath at once, the hissed
release of pain between her father's teeth.
And this was love—to mark his words on skin.
Now, those reluctant joints retire, yet his
body commits the motion to memory
as he swats a fly and kills it, yanks the weeds again.

II.

The body commits a motion to memory;
the way to strike a child, to shoot a gun.
Framed on the wall above his bed, a young
Robert salutes like a G.I. Joe, forest green
fatigues now washed to pastels. Now, I can see
the evidence of carelessness, ink undone
by a dried-up ring from years of drinking glasses. Hung
up now, the photo only hints at a story

my grandfather hates to tell.

*I wasn't in
no war—nobody to fight back then. But I
could shoot a gun, I sho' was sharp. The sound?
The sound of a shot was comfort. Felt it in
my bones. Maybe because I thought I'd die
hearing it, thought I'd hear it going into the ground.*

Corner Store

Fluorescent red and yellow letters stutter
Fair Discount: Liquor sold here. Metal bars
cover the glass, the owner's slapdash notes
on the entrance—*use the other door, no shirt
no shoes no service*—sharpied on the backs
of old receipts. These aisles I can't forget;
the quarter bags of chips I'd buy and flip
for profit in sock-rot locker rooms, the frosted
glass doors with fingerprints and drinks I dreamed
to taste-test on someone's porch steps. Older men
who gummed out *baby girl*, the smoke and corn
chip breath they offered like wrapped up candy.

*I ain't your baby girl, your sweet thang, your
nothing.* At checkout, the man before me opens
his 40, takes a swig while paying, pays
extra to cover my chips, my juice, the fear
flowering in my belly when he slaps my
ass as I leave, follows me halfway home.

How Young Boys Survive the Ghetto: 101

—*after Ghetto Boy, Chicago, Illinois by Gordon Parks, 1953*

Play house. Climb on a chair of shit-stained paisley
in an alley, avoid the broken bottles. Cut
your momma's housedress, make a cape that's maybe
a size too big. Pose for this camera, strut

like the pimps that limp these streets in zoot suits, caned
and gold-toothed. Know the power of a stuck-out
hip, its demand for respect. Practice your slang,
and call the women *shorties* until you luck out,

get slapped upside the head. Don't turn around.
Don't look behind and see the world's kept going,
that Eldorado dropping down to the ground,
its rims still spinning, pool-hall lights still glowing—

boy look into this lens, let me remember you
like this, carefree, acting a fool like you always do.

The Give and Take

*"So this is what he believes in
Your hands in the cool dirt
Until the earth gives back to you
All that you've asked of it."*

—Jacqueline Woodson

When the grass is cut my granddad limps inside
and leaves a trail of weeds for us to clean.
Much later, when we scrub the mud between
the kitchen tiles, our backs and shoulders chide
those boots. My grandma curses his bones, that string
of *tsks* and *hmphs* she punctuates with a shake
of her head. *If you don't gone and sit*, she'd say
as he kissed her from behind, his clothes still wringing

wet. But back then, I thought her fussing was rage,
a grudge against the heat that went and *settled*
down in his knees, a huff my granddad let
roll right on off of him, just like the sweat.
Her *gone and sit* was knowing pain, the nettled
prodding of time, that slow attack of age.

His Native Tongue

We hop on the Metra Electric—
 meletric rolling from your lips,
 your own engine-clack lisp.

When I buy two one-ways, you squash
your bronzed cheek to the seafoam
tinted bay and kiss
the brownstones swimming by. An older
couple cuts eyes when you echo
the train stops in monotone—
 mooseyum camps trailing the conductor's
 voice, your breath slating the window.

When we pause at Van Buren Street,
I fold your hands into
mine, muting the claps I know would come
and smiling when you heel
the seat's gorged blue instead—
 Ban Buren steet, Mommy, a profession
 into my neck as your short afro
 bristles my cheek, sponges my almond blush.

At Millennium Station, we pulse through
the underground station and up
to the street. You curb traffic as you stop
to point in intersections, and I let
you fall in love with the city another time—
 'Shago, you call it, and I
 never correct you.

Aubade: Ricky's on 95th

—after *Sugar Shack* by Ernie Barnes, 1976

Across the dancefloor, you thumb
the barstool's leather lips,

pulling the ragtag twine loose. You order
my second Long Island, paying

with the crisp dollar bills your wife can't trace,
sliding tips across the freckled counter.

Through low lights, you look everywhere
but at me—your pools of Tennessee

Honey hurtle across the bar, reflecting
Pac Man's chromatic ghosts,

mirroring Ernie's marionettes on the wall
as they rub, roll, grind, bend.

Splashes from the bar smatter canvas,
the dancers in *Sugar Shack*

sweat grenadine and soda, and I imagine
you tasted them when your lips

skimmed my shoulder last year, when Marvin Gaye urged
you to palm my hips from behind.

We looked like those dancers then,
knees bent to anchor ourselves in the waves

of wet camisoles and kissing thighs, caramel
and umber skin glossing like oil,

my back arching to ladle the sting
of her words, her bite
that would come later.

Linea Nigra

Tendrils of suds cup
her breasts like new underwire.
Her pregnancy line
some Frankenstein scar bridging
sternum down to pubic bone.

We didn't keep it.
She stares at her toes, pruning
in the blood-warm
bath. Tubsides, I watch her breath's
current roll a soaped-up tide.

She fingers the place
where the line had started to
darken, where it jumped
the gun (like her raisined chest,
the body's own derision).

I put my hand in
the water, over her hand
on her stomach. We
hold the pulse that once counted
a child's blood and feel it fade.

City Carriage

Where to?—as quick as raindrops plinking glass.
This checkered yellow knows these streets the way
Pac-man maneuvers the maze. And this backseat,
its muted city lights redressing me
in shadow negligee for the driver's private
view. In the rearview mirror, I see him grind
his jaw, chew on a question—*got a boyfriend?*
My smirk a silent mutiny: I don't
tonight. The rest of this ride is choreographed,
uncross and cross the legs, expose the shoulder
to reach an itch that's somewhere lower, dodge
the eyes on purpose—his hands on ten and two
to stay a gentleman. At my stop, the price
in red on the dashboard (*twenty nine fifteen*)
but instead I think *what now?* I slide
a forty through the hole—*keep the change*—
and another number for his glove compartment.
Out in the rain, I watch a puddle split
beneath his wheels, a surgical cut like a run
in stockings, his white eyes slitting the night in two
like headlights, or like the beep before that goddamn
voicemail, the call I never plan to answer.

BIRMINGHAM

Rush Hour Traffic

A quarter past six, a chain of brake lights dye
the sunset's underbelly, chase the skyline

like California wildfire. A Lincoln next
to me, tuxedo-black, idles in winded

screeches to match the toddler in the back,
her pacifier corsaged around her wrist,

her fingers splayed across her tongue, spit-wet.
I've half a mind to honk this horn again.

In front of me, a dog's silhouette in the back
of a pickup's window, backlit teeth and tongue,

Confederate bumper sticker crossed with peeling
raspberry paint and Alabama decals,

the unmistakable throb of hip-hop bass
rattling the cab. Like flour, clouds condense,

sponge up the sunset's fading bands of gold
and purple heat. The whites of the clouds go pink,

like the socks I accidentally washed with the darks
last week, or like cotton stained from thorn-pricked fingers,

fingers we're born to put in mouths, to suck.

Five Points

Across from Waffle House,
a saxophonist tunnels
spit into brass in front
of the church. At his feet,
his horn's
case opens its mouth
on the sidewalk,
gummy pennies clinging
to the red velvet,
a dollar bill flattened
against the cardboard
cutout inside—
anything helps.

You scuttle past like you've
got somewhere to be, hide
behind your aviator's
rainbow-and-fingerprint tint,
tell yourself
you can't be as bad
as the homeless man
that only you see,
who hunches by and swipes
a five dollar bill from the case
when the saxophonist closes
his eyes on a long note.

Either way, saxophone man
finally releases the mouthpiece
from his lips to take
a break, his yellow nails flashing
over the yellow keys,
his distended cheeks powdered
with ash. And when
you return with your five dollar
coffee, pivot back
to the corner, you become one
of the many faces
that pause to listen, clap,
walk away without
paying.

Birdwatching at Railroad Park

—after Plate 106 Black Vulture or Carrion Crow by *James Audubon, 1831*

A vulture loafs a lazy halo
over my head, charting a circle
around my bench as its frost-white wing
tips thresh the air like a paddle-fan.

It ziplines down to concrete, smooth
as a fold-by-numbers paper glider,
docks in the middle of the street
and eyes a dismembered bird, half-dead.

It tangoes, one claw in front of the other—
it's ruff deranged and spiked—and struts
across the even yellow dashes
of the street, prepares to take a bite.

Instead, the vulture eyes me, cowers
down to the pavement, wraps its wings
around the thing as if to check
for warmth or squawk a lullaby,

mirrors the birds in Audubon's plate,
hugging their prey like scarves in winter.
The vulture and prey become one bulge
of feather and muscle breathing in

the intersection, until the vulture
raises its head, a chunk of meat
and bone between its beak, perhaps
to say, *Well what did you expect?*

On Finding a Scorpion in Our Bedroom

Smaller than your pinkie
finger, about the size of the tampon
applicator topping off
the bedroom's mesh waste basket—
the scorpion froze in the sherbert-orange
glow of the bedside
lamp, a little black lowercase "t"
that had fallen on its back.

It waited right below
the two-dollar map taped to the wall,
the swollen dots of the big cities
speared with mismatched
thumb-tacks, the ones you'd never
visit with me.

And when I screamed
your name, you snaked
into the bedroom—
wordless, ill-prepared—
and followed my finger to the spot
beside the tufted headboard,
where the low light
magnified the painted bulb
of its tail in the shadows.
You slid your fingertips into your front
jean pockets—thumbs out
like a hitchhiker—
and just eyed the damn thing, squinted
and tilted your head from side
to side as if some lost instinct,
as if waiting for it to mirror
you, as if knowing
you were seeing yourself.

Low Visibility

The silent mock of pre-dawn quiet is
God putting me in time-out.
On mornings when asphalt steams
after 3 AM showers, fog
surges from the ground like smoke,
like water skipping a hot skillet,
lulls me into a game of
“What ifs.”

What if I were the last
one here, what if
there were nothing left
except the bitter espresso
on my tongue,
nothing left but that damn crack
in the upper corner of my windshield
webbing out with the colder nights,
the wipers’ almost unnoticeable stutter
over the uneven glass?

The breathing mist
slipknots itself around the car,
its heaviness muffling
the stumble of my engine
and my early morning prayer,
and I wait for a break
in the moth-grey vapor,
for a chance to steal that breath,
to let it melt on my tongue
like an after-dinner mint.

Sloss Furnace, In Operation

—*after By-Products Plants by Joseph Stella, 1923*

You drive past the factory every night
on my way home. Blankets of burning
coal slide through the vents of your Chevy
as men with soot skin work past ten.

At night, the plant is a stage; the barrel-
shaped tanks now clumsy dancers in a
formation, careening to the rhythm of
steel-toed boots. The braided window
beams reflect the factory's marigold
flames and gleam like Hollywood
skylights. With no cars behind you, you
slow down to inhale the familiar
fumes, to admire the magnificent gas
stack castling over the other machines.
Its paint—previously a bone white—
coffees over time, crumbles.

Satisfied, you pick up speed and add your
exhaust to the rest. A final look in the
rearview mirror, coal fires coloring
the windows different tinges of blue;
the stained-glass dome shrinks with distance.

A Grocery Store in Alabama

Over the apple bucket, I weigh a Granny
Smith in my hand and thumb the dents for rot.
I check for bruises like these shoppers check
for me—the blackened pit of a golden peach.

Another buggy's wheel comes screeching around
the corner, a mother peering through the shocks
of hair escaping from her bun, her toddler
pointing and poking price tags, palming fruits.

I wonder what it must be like, no pop
or sting on the hand, no preparation speech—
don't look, don't touch—from a mother trying to save
herself from the pop and sting of not-so-quiet

whispers, the manager's backhanded *ma'am*, the absence
of respect. Still—as I grab a pepper, garlic
paste—I can feel these shoppers slow around
me, as if someone paused this tape of my

black life, to point to me on screen and say
right there, we got her. I concentrate on the mist
of the veggie sprinkler, water sleeving my arm,
its hiss as soft as a mother's *shush*, or the chafe

of a handshake, sliding palms before the hollow
thump on the back, or even the mother bending
to cover her toddler's finger as she points
at me, her susurrations—*don't point at that*.

What Hopper Taught Me of Love

—after *Room in New York* by *Edward Hopper, 1932*

The kitchen table divorces us, leaves a basin
between us sloshing with
your averted eyes, noncommittal grunts,
and I wish I had Hopper's
piano to play as an excuse, a reason to turn my back.
And I would play the same note,
my wedding ring turned inward, its diamond clicking
against the key. The unsaid
stretches between us like taut piano wire ready
to be struck, to vibrate.
And you, awling holes through the newspaper
headlines instead of my
half-truths—"I think we're just too *comfortable*"—
you'd just sink further
into your chair, girdled by the plush toothless gums,
refusing to look my way,
to ask again, "What is it this time?" I'd apply pressure
to the damper pedal
to sustain the next note, hoping that it would spill
out of the window
and onto the streets below, wishing that it would pulse
through the soles
of your steel-toed boots. But it never reaches you.
Instead it resounds
through the apartment, amplifies your silence. Each
key hammers this rift
home. Suddenly, I wish I was music that you loved to read.

Pallbearers

—after Mailbox and Swing of House with Flowers, near Morgan Springs,
Alabama by William Christenberry, 1984

They bury the dead on Sundays, lug
the toy bin out onto the porch,
and place the newer dolls and action
figures in line to mourn her headless
Barbies, their father's G.I. Joes
with amputated arms and broken ankles.

So who's gon' say the eulogy?

The younger sister renders Taps
on her plastic clarinet, her brother
unearthing hard-packed clay with their father's
old spade, a head stone cut from cardboard
pressed down into the hollow grave,
the epitaph, a crayoned quote
from Doctor Seuss—*all people are people*
no matter how small—all lowercase.

*Today, we honor those who fought
the good ole' fight,*

his voice unfurling like the preacher's
over the hill as he drawls off names.
She ladles handfuls of dirt into
the hole, levels it with the toe
of her flip-flop, asks,

You think it's gonna rain?

On the way inside, the heavy bin
swaying between them—action figures
and Legos rumbling together like
the distant thunder—he tells her what
he always does.

They brave. They'll be alright.

Consignment Shop

—*after* Window with Sale Dresses, Uniontown, Alabama *by* William Christenberry, 1974

A dress floats like a child's sheet-ghost in a storefront's window, its thin metal hanger nearly invisible in the sun's

glare. On the glass, the owner's youngest child practiced writing *Sale* in yellow paint, each "s" resembling the number

2 instead. At six, the owner closes shop, flips the *open* sign to *closed*, his back-door slam unsettling dust from forgotten

mannequin heads and dressmaker forms with pins still stuck in the hips, quaking this cotton to life. And these neck-lines—

these scoops turned cowls from stretching the elastic—become the rounded lips of kitchen mason jars, the *once upon a time*

for every snag and unraveled strand, the mud stains, grass streaks, scrubbed-out blood spots dotting the moments a woman lost or regained some part of herself, sites of rememory.

Grandpa's Tree Out Back

—*after Pear Tree, near Akron, Alabama, January by William Christenberry, 2000*

Your grandchildren's new
tennis shoes must have
stripped this tree's
gray bark to the white meat,
its trunk too chapped for their hands.

And the photographs you shot through
the years, showing the tree's
right side slumping
at the end of '92,
now warps into a full
backbend, as if settling
back down into the ground, needing
to find its roots.

In next year's picture, that right
side might be cleaved
clean off by rot,
a crack of lightening, or
the weight of a teenager you don't
remember ever growing u—
but you'll still dodder out
to the backyard, take the photo
for your album more
out of custom than impulse.

With 2001 penned on a sliver
of electrical tape, in its slot
beneath the plastic cover,
your tree sucks up
the color of summer, the backdrop
dried out like white socks and tan stockings
on a clothesline, like your
camera dipped this place
in water, held it at arm's length
and fanned it out.

Pantoum for Black Boys

—after *African Night Market* by Walter Battiss, 1965

As the sky's colors separate like oil in water,
black men turn blue in the sunset.
Flies hover over the tables,
circle like buzzards: fruit left for dead.

Black men turn blue in the sunset
like cotton dipped in indigo. Police
circle like buzzards, fruit left for dead—
a red smudge on a white sheet.

Like cotton dipped in indigo, police
lights spotlight the streets;
a red smudge on a white sheet
marks the end of childhoods.

Lights spotlight the streets,
but the dark squares of sidewalk
mark the end of childhoods,
and the mothers have nothing

but the dark squares of sidewalk
to blame. We light candles, we pray,
and the mothers have nothing
but an empty room to fill, to lock away,

to blame. We light candles, we pray
for a night without bloodshed, a night that is nothing
but an empty room to fill, to lock away.
I want to be you

for a night. Without bloodshed. A night that is nothing
but a trip to the gas station in a hoodie. Damn,
I want to be you
as the sky's colors separate like oil in water.

My Father's Love Letter

You'd had a drink, I'm sure, a midday buzz
enough to make you fix your epitaph
in ink and mail it, plain as a postcard. Your

handwriting: teenage cursive spread across
two pages like some high school love note, folded
in fours and slipped between a locker's gills.

Perhaps you should have drawn in the margins, squiggled
elementary hearts with arrows, dressed this whole
thing up as if it weren't goodbye for good.

Stay humble, be true to yourself reads like *Take care*
when I'm gone.

At the bottom of the envelope, I fish
out a dog tag engraved with two shadows,
a father and daughter holding hands,

the metal cool as a razor between my fingers.
And when I mail it back, you call and say nothing
about wanting to die, or the divorce. Just repeating

the same thing, as if I were the one that called
and got your voicemail, your voice skipping over and over—
so you don't love me, now?

Psychic

—after Palmist Building, Havana, Alabama by William Christenberry, 1980

Beyond the bone-white clapboard, thumbs
massage the grooves of my palm, outline the “m”
of crisscrossed wrinkles.

Child, relax. You ain't gon break.

I close my eyes and let you dig for death
between my knuckles, press for cancer in
my valley point. Don't you go bringin' bad
juju.

Look there—you were famous in another life.

I jitter my leg beneath the tablecloth,
consider asking for a refund while
your breathing whistles through the gap of your two
front teeth on each exhale. A drop of my sweat
zig zags a path from armpit to hip. You hit
a pressure point in the dip between the knuckles
of my middle and index fingers before you say—

This place will swallow you whole.

As I leave, I wonder
if I could put my hands to the walls and feel
the chinaberry tree, wrappings its lips
around this house, gulping you down.

If I Stay

The back porch netting
transforms me into some

scaly thing while
the August heat irons

me flat into the metal glider.
Mosquito bites

unlevel my damp skin.
In the silence left

by my own body's betrayal,
the dog at my feet streaks

the house's screen door
with nose-wet pollen. Inside,

the nursery unfinished,
half-painted, uneven streaks

stopping halfway up
the wall like the top of a picket

fence; the fume of baby blue
buckets through the house.

Out here, over the sound of
your truck tires pressing

into gravel, the soft wail
of the swing cries

faulty,

defective.