

Last Love Poem

Between your decision to leave and the day
you left, I'd wake at four and watch you sleep,
the way I'd done decades before—shocked
that you were in my bed, distressed that my quick
pulsing cries kept me sleepless, brought you peace.
At four-fifteen, barefoot, half-dressed, I'd fetch
the news in the yard, rouse the neighbor's dogs,
who growled and leapt at my strangeness in the dark.
The dogs, the gravel drive's sharp gray stones,
November chill, the smells of winter-tides
withdrawn, cracked oyster shells, the soft wet mud,
more comfort than our bed. Out here, my feet,
my eyes, legs, hands and hips knew where to go.

A possum had been rotting in the drive,
about mid-way to the road. I'd scent it out
in my dark walks, afraid my foot might land
on wet hair, the gravel soften to decay.
I know I should have moved it at first light,
scooped matted hair, dried skin, disjointed limbs,
and tossed it off the pier to feed the crabs.
But once you'd peck my cheek on your way out,
my day's task was keeping blood and bones
together. The questions—do I still wash your clothes,
prepare your meals, guess how to tell the kids—
held me still until I'd hear your car come
down the drive. I'd count the days remaining—
fifteen, ten, five.

The day you left—patting
wallet, cell phone, keys—my house took on
the face a child draws of home. Windows
blank, dilated eyes, a bloody gaping
mouth to signal door.

I took the shovel
and hunted what was left. The spine, jigsawed
in stone, a skull, some hair, the teeth remained.
I parsed a tooth, pressed a point into my hand
to feel the bite—sharp, alive—in dead things.