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Ruth, Mt. Tabor Nursing Home, 1972

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Ruth, Mt. Tabor Nursing Home, 1972

The nurses can ignore a bed
but not the pink-faced cries
of a woman who screams
each afternoon to the bone.
Where are your children, Ruth?
Are they embarrassed
whose silence you cannot bear
from the photograph in your useless purse?
They have become the vacancy
of plastic flowers.

I am just a boy who mops
the ice-tea spilled, and urine
threading towards the door.

Sometimes I hear my father
muttering little dust-sounds
to himself in the basement,
among the wrenches his hands
have warmed, among the boxed histories
of his blood, and a mattress
that helped make my still-born brother.

I am afraid when the dying won't use words.