

Cemetery Road

No one's been buried here for years,
 on this hill above the landing strip
 where lovers park, nights, and watch
 what few small planes come and go —
 maybe they love each other more,
 witnessing these ordinary departures.

The evergreens are overgrown,
 and the fence just a halfhearted gesture.
 A few of the thinner slates —
 dark today because it's rained
 all morning, the sky hovering
 at the edge of the second snow —

are smashed to pieces, a few
 worn illegible. Those that stand
 lean together in clusters,
 stone archipelagos: *Glory*
with all her lamps shall burn . . .
Weep not for me,

I've quit my house of clay . . .
 There's no narrative here —
 only sentimental or cautionary verses
 under the incised urns and willows,
 the winged, weeping faces —
 but I wanted to tell you this story:

once I watched a psychic healer
 draw pain out with such neutrality,
 the way one pulls a weed sometimes,
 finding it neither ugly nor beautiful,

merely noting its presence
where it isn't wanted. She told me

to imagine the garden within myself,
inviolable, and asked me to invite
into that brilliant shade
the women who had comforted me:
my grandmother with her red-lettered Bible,
my mother, on her good days.

And when she told me to divide
my own memory, and banish
the darker mother from the garden
I could not, because wherever she was
she was wrapped in a long healing,
and it was all right now.

But the psychic said,
"There is no time there.
All of the story happens at once;
bar her from the garden."
And when I had finished the work,
the others who had come to be healed

held me while I was, for a time,
the purely vulnerable child again.
For days I felt furrowed and broken, and doubted
anything had happened at all
but the recurrence of my own grief.
I was wrong. I can't explain

how I know the dead continue,
how sometimes we carry them
and sometimes they propel themselves
into huge distances they understand
only a little better than we do.
And whatever injured me, Mother,

I want to tell you that childhood
is only a little blue grave now.
See, the boy beneath this slate

was born in 1798, and lived a single day,
but anyone walking here one hundred
and eighty-nine years has read his name.

And my own death is only a minor island,
and I will go past it, as you have.
Perhaps you prepare it already,
as one readies a room for guests:
here the clean linens, here
a porcelain bowl. Why did we ever stop

burying beloved objects, the things
found in tombs: toys, jewelry, roses?
What did that child have time
to love, descending into this chilly ground
before his mother's hands
even came into focus? And because

there is no time there,
you are also here with me,
ten years gone and walking
these ruts in the cemetery road,
the wind smelling of new snow
and October, gathering in a rush

under the stiff wings carved
on these blackened stones.
They lift you with such force and grace
I would never think of calling you back.
You are going forward into your future,
though perhaps what lies before you
can't be called that.