

REBECCA MORGAN FRANK

Pilgrimage

The clouds went through them like a ghost.
They left no chill. They took something and
sailed it across the range. Peak to peak. Then
farm and further out to village, the shrubs
of suburbia. The garage doors grated
up and down. The clouds commuted in, past
the city to the sea. No one noticed the pilfering,
each body still moving, emptied out, back on the ridge.
A man marched up with a golf club, a girl raced the ridge
in barefoot shoes. Quarreling couples with packs
leaned on metal poles. The rocks crumbled. More clouds
moved through the rising crowds. No one
noticed that anything was missing: a memory,
a yearning, a taste, a tendency to whistle,
a proclivity. A fib, a family secret, an unwritten tune.
The magpie clouds were dark in light skies,
whitewashed in blues, and they built their nests
with what they took from inside. The people on the ridge

had parked their cars, and jingled and joked their way up.
Felt strangely lighter on descent. Left with the smell of mint

and pine and mud. Later they would check their shoes,
feel a pebble that wouldn't reveal itself, a nudging,

something so gone it couldn't be noticed as gone.
The littleness of theft. The magpie clouds

spilled their wares and the possessions washed to shore.
Stuck in sand to a foot, were drunk in salt.

This is how the earth continues
to weigh the same. We lose a fear, a memory of the dead.

Grow a longing. A reach. A whole body ache.
Swallow the clouds as they swallow us.