

Morning Ritual

I

My mother's nightgown, old smell,
lots of wear from all the wearing;

her stewed tea and cigarettes, *Himself upstairs*
breathing out foaming pints of weekly rent.

Her jobs at Woolworth's and KC Cleaner's,
no-where-else-to-go and no-way-to,

her words cracking every dawn:

I never wanted to marry you!
You dragged me down the aisle!

Up the narrow stairs, we three kids
pull pillows over our heads.

II

In a foreign land, decades later,
I am half-awake at dawn,

mumbling over burning pyres
built during the night's complaints.

Why my inward litany,
of done-upons and done-to-me?

I have a room to read and write,
flower beds filled with growth,
a house where my boy can sleep.

Why do I wake in her head
with the only view she had—

a gray rope to hang the wash.

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