

## The Disappeared

He is smiling, but a hard skull  
floats silently beneath the surface  
of his face. For years, his mother  
carried this photo through the streets  
of Buenos Aires, but since she died,  
it sits on a shelf in his own house,  
where his wife waits for the day  
he will return to scoop the words  
from where they fell into filigrees of dust  
and stuff them back into his mouth.

Once, she turned over in her sleep  
and woke, mistaking a shadow on the wall  
for the shape of an old story  
about the day he wandered away  
from the village, a child going as far  
as the ocean, but it was only a stain.  
She lay awake until daylight, afraid  
of forgetting, but the next day,  
when she opened a closet door,  
his laughter fluttered out of the darkness,  
where it had been chewing holes in an old coat.

There are murmurs smudged into the skin  
behind her left ear, the sound of her own name  
needled onto the inside of her thigh.  
Some nights, it is her mother-in-law  
who cries on the wind moving through  
the curtains, but mostly  
it is his voice she hears  
in small birds of rain on the roof.