

Headlights

I picture her in the white Honda,
the white summer dress
with little purple flowers,
and strappy white sandals
even though the accident happens in winter.

Does she see it coming?
Does she see headlights spinning
skidding through the snow?
Does she scream? Is she scared?

Or maybe it all happens so fast
the only thing she can think to do
is absorb the impact into herself,
nestle it next to me in her clenched body
along the curve of my spine
and carry us both to term.

I wonder sometimes
if my mom thinks that accident made me gay.
If somehow the force of two steel bodies
colliding on an ice-slick road did something
to my unborn body inside of her.

I wonder if she thinks the seat belt
snapping across her overripe belly
jiggled my soft bones or bruised my soft brain.
Or if the crunch of the steering wheel
on her swollen taut skin
flipped a soft switch inside of me,
something tiny and invisible,
the effect of which at the time
had yet to be determined.

And later, when it does come out
between long drags of cherry limeade slush,
does she see them again? Headlights
in the snow. Does she tighten every muscle
like she did back then? And think,
Ah, here it is:

She'd been expecting something all along.
Not a failure exactly or a punishment,
but finally the long-awaited echo
of that frightful thump against her belly.