

RUTH DICKEY

Wilmington, N.C.

Fleeing beeps and whorls, passing minutes till sunrise,
I snuck out of the hospital to smoke on the granite steps,

the night damp, giant moon hanging, a tin ornament
behind magnolias. Grateful reprieve from vinyl chair,

from curling on the laminate arm, waking to the pulse ox
alarm,
nurse rounds, yawning chasm of hours, mom squirming on her
back,

more infant than parent, everything unspooling.

I keep coming back to this night. The yellow of the moon.
Bitter coffee in a styrofoam cup. Something languid in the air,

Spanish moss like swaying kelp. Horrible yes, but also open,
a starfish unfurling arms, anemone undulating, oddly hopeful.

The Letters, 2

1.

I realize now the final years were different:
you were so quiet, Dad called it *winding down*;

I've been most surprised how he's stepping
toward life, how loves make us moons

to their orbits. It's hard to admit
grief reshapes, enlarges. So here I am

not fully either, shifted. I told you everything;
the end, so deeply silent. This fall is last fall:

changing leaves and amber light. I get angry
people don't remember – I want it to have mattered

to everyone. Beyond deer and hummingbirds:
manatees, zebras, gardenias always in bloom.

2.

He surprised me, saying yes to living.
I wish I could give you these words:

between, lemon, light, fury. I want

to write stories. I will get a lot wrong,

because I never asked. Please forgive me.

When I came for your mastectomy, you sent a card that read:

thank you thank you thank you thank

over and over and over, letters split among words,
wall of text filling the card. There are no words beyond

I miss you I miss you I miss you I miss

A pint glass from our old mechanic,
filled to brimming with moonlight and loss.

3.

I don't know what forward looks like,
three years both crumb and banquet.

It's supposed to rain the whole time, but I don't care.
I want beach, rain, dog, cold, wet, and then fire.

It's confusing here. Also, enormous cedar trees
furred with moss. Moments without rain.

Today I wanted to live in a small town. Today I knew
why you loved small places. I wish I could tell you:

How scared I am. How wonderful things are. How awful.
I wish you would show up with apple cake, give lollipops, say,

It's R's birthday today. Even if it's not. I wish
you could be here, loving me

enough to be ridiculous. Especially that.
Most of all that.