

## Urraca

In the yard, two magpies  
fight over the still-warm carcass  
of a less fortunate and nameless  
bird. Their shrieking uncoils  
like barbwire from my mother's flinching  
ear. Meanwhile my lover's

eye glazes over, no longer here  
but far from here on one of many  
custody-arranged road trips  
back and forth from Wichita  
in the backseat of his grandfather's car  
with his brother

scouring the skies and splintered fence  
posts for a flash of yin and yang tail feathers.  
"Urraca!" they'd cry, and grandfather  
would award them both a quarter  
for their retained Spanish – grandma laugh-  
sighing on the passenger side.

Now my lover and his brother  
are older – his brow furrowed  
in a wrinkle deep enough  
to stick a coin in. And the quarters  
in his grandfather's pockets,  
if there were any, have long since dropped

onto the cold hospital floor  
as a nurse folded them the morning  
after lightning struck in his chest  
and took him to the next world.  
Meanwhile the magpies  
go about their brutal business –

softened in the memory of a child.  
Their long tail feathers like a bridge  
between worlds – my lover standing  
at one end, arms outstretched, crying:  
"Urraca! Urraca! Urraca!"

Light in the shape of his grandfather  
reaching back from the other,  
pulling a quarter like a silver tooth

from the mouth of the sun.