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.