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Declarations from Ghosts

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DECLARATIONS FROM GHOSTS

Rachel Eliza Griffiths

Some days I go to Saint Monica's
and touch the pews: I cannot pray
to wood. Instead I watch the old
women who have outlived you.
I study their wrinkled hands, hues
of liver spots, the wedding
rings slipping around their knuckles.
I pray for death before my body can betray
me: brief cathedral of miracle.

You were not a small woman. Large
and full, you filled the chambers of my living
heart with your study of details: the miracle
of miniature, the pause between chords.
I had not put my arms around you enough.
The last day I came to your house I stood in the foyer,
needing to say something. Too late,
your husband said. One year later he was betrayed
by the cancer in his throat. He couldn't swallow
that sight: a silent kettle on the stove
in a cold, green kitchen.

I study calendars while I sit in the pews
counting the empty boxes. The perfect empty
days are vacant coffins, the comfort
of numbers like condolences. I do not live
by calendars anymore. My own time is the passing
of light and dream and love over
my face like saltwater drenching a rock.
At the repast, I held your remains, the box
less than ten pounds, as though you were again

an infant. The royal blue velvet softened the hard
corners of the urn. I imagined the once beating heart, no more
than a pound while you lived.

Tell me you are dead. Declare it
a certainty. So that, in my dreams and days
and daily routes, I will not pause and call
for you. I will worship the grocery store,
the cathedral, the yellow café, and the park,
not stopping for ghosts who, over and over,
call out your name.