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RUNNER-UP

Proof of Disappearing

How long will the body be a story
that matters? A dent in grass. Tracks
in snow. An imprint of presence—

Of absence? I lie awake & listen
to night's endless sentence & imagine
how silence sounds. If the dead walk
between us. Their ghosts, a tissue
of smoke. I think of the women who shed
their names like old skin for me. How careless

I have been with questions never asked. How,
they must've walked across continents. Carried
wars they held silent, as knobs in their bones.

Still, as light transfigures through slatted
blinds, I am haunted by these unknowns.
Their language, their stories, are losses

I want to know how to sorrow. Their names
appear on the back of my photographs. Certificates
of birth, of death: Proof we share blood. Yet,
they seem as foreign as Istanbul, Palestine, Beirut.
As much as I am foreign in my countries
of origin. Still, their faces come to me—distant,
& familiar as stars hung on night's sleep-
less cheek. Clippings of fingernails, an eye-
lash, strands of hair. Remnants of impermanence

liting my pillow. At dawn, the winged
elm casts through my window. Its stiff
silhouette—fracturing, in the half-lit light.