

The Song

I know why you left, why we were
not enough, my sisters and I, our tiny
joys measured against his absence.
Outside the white room where you lay
in a crisp bed, delirious with loss,
a family friend told me a story.
No talk of Jesus welcoming the children,
not in a Communist country, not
in that hospital, where strangers' ears
were cocked to listen for anyone
daring to bash the system, but yes,
of a better place, where a young pioneer
tore down a castle to build hovels,
all of them alike. I questioned his wisdom,
but he was only a baby, an incomplete
baby at that, so what did he know?
It all made sense then. It all makes sense
now, as I write this. I tell myself a story
because I need to. You would have
liked it, mama. I make you look good.
You're still a language spinner,
weaving your own shroud. Death
cannot contain you, unless you let it.
In your last months, worn down
by pain, you wanted out. You,
who hated travel, were ready to go.
Listen to me, mămico: you're pain-free
in my story. Having secured your exit,
you're well on your way to forget us.
And someone travels along with you.
You and the brother I never met,
whom I envied because he died before

he was born, stand side by side on a ferry,
crossing a silent river, surrounded
by silent people neither of you knows.
Sunken cities float by like ghosts
of places and my brother is too small
to see. You shake off your torpor, the dust
of sudden, never mind if expected,
death and lift the boy up to show him
the Styx. His thoughts sway like translucent
algae. They brush your thoughts, they
soak up color from distant memories,
which could also be dreams, or nightmares,
but aren't. The boy in your arms points
at a vanishing house, the one with the pale
yellow porch, where a woman's shadow
bends over in grief. *I know you*, his thoughts
say as he turns toward you, as he mirrors
something more than joy, something
that only the two of you share. You tear
at your sutured mouth. Words tumble
through the rift into the muscled
current—a school of fish. You sing to him,
your boy, taken away by a nurse before
you could hold him. You hold him now.
The waves are liquid putty. There's
so much you could do here with your
new voice if you just keep on singing.
Look! my brother shouts, *look!*
and laughs for the first time after death,
the first time ever, though you believe
you've heard him laugh like that
in your womb. Death has a rainbow
heartbeat. Death rocks you both on waves
stitched through with rainbow fish.