It was The Light that ripped us apart and saved us.
All Hallows’ Eve

Bodies move suspecting nothing.
A child pours herself into her Halloween costume—a dead virgin with blood-painted face—and goes door-to-door knocking.

I never wanted to celebrate the dead this way. Mama, in her South Carolina room, hears the oxygen tube slip from your nose and sees your eyes turn from her. I call to see how you are doing. Mama picks up and puts down the phone. The children on our separate streets must skip in their costumes, collect candy in the name of the gory dead.

You are as I last saw you: in the chair, oxygen expanding your chest. Your imagined whisper to my mother, her hand with olive oil to your forehead. A disconnected phone in my hand. I’d think it tragic to call home at the time of your death, except it’s not. I’d think it bad luck you should die, like my grandfather, in my mother’s arms. Except, I know we cannot prepare for it.
We cannot count down to the moment of our departure.

The children rap at my door in death suits, skeletal costumes. Spirits and demons walk out into the night with its raucous possibilities. I am inside. You are no longer inside, but traveling: this flying I’m scared to do, this dying I fear.

We move on this way, propelling ourselves into our fears. Frozen on my bed, I say *Children stop this death parade, Mama use your hands, Daddy, answer the phone.* But my gut says you are gone. You are never coming back. At midnight, the children stop their rapturous inquiries. My father calls in tears, crying this song I do not wish to know.
Daddy is approaching fifty. I fret because it was his father’s age at death. All he desired of life was to surpass his father. Fifty-one is the only limit left to hurdle.

Six states away he watches his last living blood turn rock and disintegrate. He calls, hesitation constricts his words. I don’t know if you know, but he is aware my knowledge comes from what he wills over the line, the distances between us.

He begins to cry. Maybe you’ll write a poem about but I know he means, soon there will be no one to tell the story. He dictates It’s funny, Mom never wanted to die in a nursing home. She spent weeks in his house and he washed her, fed her. She always said ‘you’re a man once but a child twice.’

He grabs the air. My baby brother is a child twice. He cannot live in his own house.
I don’t mention karma or God’s vengeance, how Grandma couldn’t spend her last days at home because the same brother refused to care for her. *He is going*—
I fill the blank with: *to die?*
But the space is: *to a nursing home.*
Daddy whimpers  *His skin is falling off his legs, he cannot care for his self.*
I think about the law of God. An eye for an eye.
He starts again: *Maybe you’ll write*—
And I say *Yes, yes.*