In the swamp, bald cypress roots globe
like curved fingers learning to play
piano. We scour the green
for a twitch, stare at mud
for minutes, hoping to see our first
gator. How after a diagnosis,
there is a searching, a cataloging
of bruises, expressions, days marked
as good, bad. How in the swamp,
every orange flower is the beak
of a white ibis. How after, Dad tells her
to put Ovaltine in her milk instead
of Hershey’s. How every shadow between
trees is drying anhinga
wings. How quiet
mornings—a nameless weight
anchored to our static limbs—mean
more, how the words we fill
them with mean less. How in the swamp, gator
tails sprout from mud, and in every passing
log are their wary eyes
and snouts. How your eyes feel
fooled when you see the black ancient
armor, the wading birds swirling blue
and lavender—fooled, you thought
they could have missed
this. How every phone call could be the phone call.

How when it comes, it plows over your legs. How it slaps and stings your chest. How every last word becomes.
In the pantry, she boxes \text{R} \quad \text{and piles}
\begin{align*}
\text{in every spice} & \quad \text{and flameless} \\
\text{candle. She sinks} & \quad \text{A} \quad \text{to the bottom} \\
\text{of the toilet} & \quad \text{tank, fluffs} \\
\text{P} \quad \text{into her pillow. (I think} & \quad \text{it whispers} \\
\text{to her} & \quad \text{at night.) She buries} \\
\text{E, the letter turning} & \quad \text{a door-knock} \\
\text{into forced} & \quad \text{entry, under} \\
\text{the brick} & \quad \text{patio. These letters}
\end{align*}

\begin{align*}
\text{hop} & \quad \text{off my sister’s} \\
\text{tongue, mold} & \quad \text{into nouns, speak} \\
\text{as passive} & \quad \text{verbs—(I \text{ was}} \\
\text{raped)—but actively} & \quad \text{voice} \\
\text{through her body} & \quad \text{and brain. (He} \\
\text{raped me.)} & \quad \text{(He} \\
\text{ran.) She was a moth} & \quad \text{pinned—} \\
\text{Correction: He pinned her} & \quad \text{like a moth} \\
\text{to a body panel of steel.}
\end{align*}
Scour the raised bumps of your armpit, feel the washcloth scrape as you attempt to remove every trace of deodorant. Still it builds beneath your fingernails. Think of your high school chemistry teacher saying, *chemicals in deodorant turn male fish female*. Don’t think about parabens found in cancerous breast tissue. Decide to stink for the rest. Don’t listen to the TV; *if you or a loved one has been diagnosed with ovarian cancer after using talcum powder you may be entitled*. Don’t remember the white bottle and blue cap of Johnson & Johnson’s sitting in your grandmother’s bathroom. Tell yourself, *your breasts and your ovaries are fine*. Don’t think about the lead paint pamphlet your landlord gave you. Don’t search for peeling instead of sleeping. There were only traces in the door frames, right? Or was it the windows? In the morning, roll Dove on again.
Did Anna Bertha Ludwig Ask to Be Seen Through?

Her fingers were strange teeth or shaven
tree branches with a few knuckled knots
remaining, fog rising from their bark.
She called it, a vague premonition
of death. How frightening
to see her hand pooling up
from darkness, holding the absence
of being held. Her wedding ring
confusing gravity, the faint reminder
of a skeleton behind every blink
and hair braid. The Father of Radiology
won a Nobel. She left the world
her bones, as I will.
The child she never wanted arrives, divides, silent
inside her: The blunt breath of winter

in your pocket, you walk into the grocery store, hands
numb, trembling. Carrying

exactly what you came for, you walk out, startled
into a scraping rainstorm you reason

should be snow. A Canadian wind bitters
your throat. The irreparable wetness

of brown paper bags, the missing
raincoat. If it were snow, you’d lie
down, enveloped in the cold sureness of bulbs
below the surface each day speaking louder. Instead,

you wish to undo what can’t—rain into water vapor
into ocean, gray clouds into past tense.
Sustenance

A nesting doll missing its guts, I crave
filler (not for wrinkles or beef). I want a river
rock inside of me or rolled oats or a smooth
finger. I want the Oxford English Dictionary or a man
or all of a sand dollar. I want the moon’s smirking
gleam or light spliced by leaves or wild
celery or Bach’s Cello Suites. I want a child’s
curved pinky and fluttering
beat. Does this make me empty
or hungry or a woman? I want you, the fullness
of this lack I chew and chew.