When Our Mother Left

1.

Once upon a time,
we knew our mother's posture as she stood
at the stove & the smell of her laughter
as she tasted the gumbo

& our father was more than an oil stain in the garage.

2.

We stack 57 empty tuna cans into a castle in the corner
to make space on the kitchen floor to play.

We don't touch the pots. We know, like icicles
attach to tongues, they will stick to our fingers,
stain our black knuckles white, burn until we beg

for the woman she was. She sleeps on the first floor
of a main street. Her eyes stay shut as our stomachs grumble
so we crack a window & her spine stiffens as if the feet

outside are shuffling up her back & the horns
make her heart pound against her chest like a heavy fist
in rush hour traffic. She curses as she slams the window shut.

We carry empty dishes to her bedside and with each bite
of wind pie and air sauce we want to ask her why nothing
sounds so loud as it settles in our stomachs.

We sit in the corner where crumbs of her have gathered,
backs together, eyes closed & try to find our mother