She Took Off Her Wings And Shoes

Bishop, Suzette

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ONE SUMMER

With the laundry machines, we spin and whir through the afternoon small, inessential—braided girls, boys in torn shirts, babies crying. Women smoke as they fold hot clothes, a bone-thin attendant wipes down the machines. I stay until my gaze is pulled from the concrete floor and orange plastic chairs to the heavily vined streets, to the ashes beginning to fill with nightfall. I carry a sack of clothes along the honeysuckle-lined roads empty of young students. I let the rain cool my sweating back and legs. Nothing ever touches me during the days of that summer as I type forms in a basement office, windowless. I spend the summer nights alone. The woman upstairs passes over the floorboards hourly to her crying child. I finish a paper for school on A Midsummer Night’s Dream, writing at night beneath the hurricane lamp, serge-blue curtains drawn between me and the awakened cicadas, skunk, possum. A few times a man visits me in the kitchen. I lean back in the rocking chair. One night he leaves then returns an hour later during a fierce thunderstorm knocking out the lights. I let him into the house. I am holding a candle. We make love, and rain-filled air cools our bodies. And he leaves. I wake to find the living room ceiling caved in, the plaster covering everything. I stand among the ghostly shapes of furniture.