She Took Off Her Wings And Shoes

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ONE SUMMER

With the laundry machines, we spin and whirl 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.