After a fourteen-hour flight over the ocean,
I’m suddenly in a place
where I don’t understand anything
anyone is saying
as we wait in the customs line.
And then in the subterranean part
of the airport, we watch the conveyer belts
turning around and around without our bags.
I don’t think I thought
to put a pair of clean underwear
or toothbrush in my backpack.

Our friend comes to pick us up,
the taxi races to Rome at over 100mph,
I hang on, the landscape a blur,
the hot wind rushing in through the windows.

The first place he takes us after lunch,
and after a maze of narrow streets, is a church.
At first, I can’t see
as my eyes adjust to the dark interior
after the full sunshine outside.
What I notice first is the dank smell,
like dirty laundry.
I thought it was just the smell of an old
stone building, crowded in mid-July.
But antleresque decorations and chandeliers
become clearer, focused, made of bones,
cupping the candlelight,
the bones of the monks who lived here.

Dinner is several courses.
I don’t remember the dessert,
something very rich.
The mirrored dining room is still hot
even though there is an air conditioner
in the window, called a Cool Wagon.
We take our time filling out,
pushing further away
from the white tablecloth.