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Field

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All my friends who loved trees are now dead,
my grandmother said, and now she is.

She had a green thumb. She loved medical shows.
How can you see all that blood, all that cutting? I asked.

She said, *I wanted to become a doctor.*

She wanted to travel the world. She taped the world
map on her table, drew a line from Chicago to Busan.

She loved me. She was tired of living.

I wanted to pretend. Be protected from her death.

In the Field Museum, I stroll among *Birds of America*,
life-size paintings of specimen doing what they do:

a pair of long-billed curlews, standing next to tall grass.
A roseate spoonbill, twisting toward water.

Audubon went through great troubles, observing them flying
and look after their young, then somehow,

killing these birds. Now here I am, observing the pretend-
portraits, protected from the blood, the cutting.

Walking through the taxidermy wing, I see more animals
who loved trees, who died to pretend.

Just last month, taking turns pouring dirt over her coffin,
her children commented how she chose the perfect day to go:

a warm Saturday with blue skies, too warm, in fact, for January.



She is so good at forecasting the weather, my uncle praised,
as if she was just in another wing.

Her grave is contracted for 50 years, another thing I learned then--

where our bodies lie are temporary exhibits.
In the Intensive Care Unit before her death,

I was annoyed at how beautiful the nurse was, standing
next to my grandmother's swollen hands and feet,

at her foundation, curly eyelashes, roseate blush,
her life painted into display.

Then, I was ashamed.

After my grandmother died, my mother entered the morgue,
the only one out of her children.

She watched the body getting cleaned and dressed.
She observed the blues and greens

of a dead body, its cold limbs twisting out.

She curled out my grandmother's dried lips,

then, with her makeup, started painting her.