To J.W. from Reno
Joanne Mallari

Already I am waiting for autumn
and its small glimpses of resurrection:
At Idlewild, the leaves will change
color like scales. Did I tell you
about my sister who came before?
She spent a mere three days on earth
(it was October, the year of the dragon),
and my parents called a priest to perform
the last rites. I don’t believe in purgatory,
but it sounds preferable to heaven.
Imagine sitting on a cloud for the rest
of eternity, sounding a trumpet you never
learned to play. When our fathers
talk about heaven, they say they’ll reap
the rewards for their suffering
(the women they put up with, the work
they endured). The more they look up,
they forget to look down. When our mothers
talk about heaven, they describe a spring day.
At seven, I imagined the rolling hills
and Mama Mary welcoming us with open
arms like a scene from *The Sound of Music.*
Now, I wonder if our parents’ heaven
would be my hell—the stagnant, perpetual
grace of it all. What if heaven is not a fixed
destination but a pendulum between one season
and the next? See the leaves waiting to fall
so they can shroud the ground. In Reno,
days swing between the heat of summer
and a glimpse of winter. Let heaven be
a mile marker rather than a finish line.
Let heaven be a chrysalis rather than
a butterfly. Let resurrection
happen like the fall.