

PLAYING POSSUM

This is my mother, newly-dead, Mom says. She died without suffering.

I fondle the photo of my maternal grandma playing possum.
A dead possum in a ditch is called *roadkill*.
A possum who's just playing is not yet *carcass*.
The women in my family will play anything to make you
wonder. Just to see what you'd say about us then.

The woman in the photo is my namesake.
The photo taken by the man she met and married in med school.
It was he who administered the final morphine injection
when breast cancer claimed her brain. He did this
without telling their daughters. He consulted none, invited

none into the living room of the Transylvanian cottage
he drafted and built by hand. It was her green dream-house.
He did it because she wanted to remain herself.
She made him *promise*. She made him promise again.

She said *if you love me....*

He signed her request with a blue fountain pen
from Czechoslovakia. The contract hid among papers, letters,
photos he preserved, images of her naked breasts, arms raised
above her head, his *Alina*, winsome, hungry, amorous,
and finally, finally, faceless....two gray hands

locked in languor over her chest. An orthodox cross
laid over v-shaped limbs, a flock of birds on their way to the Danube.

I am an atheist now, he announced.

But no one believed. None believed a man who hated god so faithfully
could ever come to disbelieve Himself. This was Ceausescu's Romania.
The dictator ruled from posters with iron fists. I know hate
and hope are kindred, knit through our palms. And these lines

in my hand: a silenced mutation.