

Practice

by Ellen Bryant Voigt

To weep unbidden, to wake
at night in order to weep, to wait
for the whisker on the face of the clock
to twitch again, moving
the dumb day forward—

is this merely practice?
Some believe in heaven,
some in rest. We'll float,
you said. Afterward
we'll float between two worlds—

five bronze beetles
stacked like spoons in one
peony blossom, drugged by lust:
if I came back as a bird
I'd remember that—

until everyone we love
is safe is what you said.

From Shadow of Heaven (W.W. Norton, 2002)