

On Grandmother's Couch

The only doctor in Franklin, Idaho,
was drunk that night, so a midwife
caught my grandmother before she fell
onto the rough kitchen table.

Eighty-six years later, we sit
on her plastic-covered couch,
her scarecrow body slumping
into mine, hands like orange peel,
curled across my forearm, grabbing
at almost anything today.

Because I have hair, she calls me
Nathan—her teenage gardener who says
he feels guilty each time my mother pays him.
All bald men are Arnold—her husband
twenty-eight years dead.

Our silent hour is punctuated
only by her struggle
to breathe through thick phlegm
that refuses to rise. I sit, cradling her frame,
and count the tiptoe rhythm of her heart,
every measure decrescendo.

—Quinn Warnick