Linda McQuarrie-Bowerman

Looking Upward

There it is, Wendy! Second star to the right and straight on 'til morning
—J. M. Barrie, *Peter Pan*

for Wendy

Snug in your oversized red coat and Fair Isle beanie,
you're like a little girl
in our mother's clothes, but not quite—your silver hair a waterfall
under moonshine, as we wait for the Southern Lights.
We shiver despite the layers, flanked by the dunes shifting
under the ocean's salty breath.

Your eyes blink against the night air as you scan the sky for a sign,
pointing out fragments of movement;
I stamp my feet on damp sand,
squinting up, damned if I can spot anything except a conga line
of the Milky Way and stars, impressive as they are, far from the blaze of colour
you've dragged me out to see.

You want to stay—I grumble it's not worth freezing, and the old torch
might give out,
the black so absolute, we'd have to inchworm through the dark.
You give in, and we head towards the car, careful to spotlight
banksia roots snaked across the track; the trees' cone-shaped spikes
loom like thick hands towards our faces,

and their branches shudder under the surf's heavy sighs, as the torchlight
splutters. Silence creeps from your coat
                to fog across my face
and chill my gloveless hands, and if I wasn't cold enough,
guilt finds an open button under my chin
and pokes me with its frigid fingers.

For a heartbeat, I lose you when the shadows
splice between us, and it feels like the day you packed a bag
to leave.
    Divorce
bled money, and friends who weren't, long after marriage
was the bird flip to Mum and Dad.
        The years left you like a sea cave,
                hollow,
carved into rock by violent shocks of wave strike—
hardened layers battered, every fissure forced open.

So we stopped nagging you to come back and for twelve years waited,
                while you stalled time
in Italian villages, up and down narrow cobbled streets,
along the unfathomable blue of Cinque Terre's coast,
and on the top floor of an old Genoese convent,
its kitchen the size of the envelope you meant to post letters in
to a home that wasn't.