**Driving through North Philly**

I see them. The shoes

on Eighth Street—there must be

thirty pair perched upside down.

An uneven silhouette of sneakers

slung over electric wire;

the lightness soaked out of them,

except for the eager cleats,

less familiar with the whims of weather.

Here a boy doesn’t give up shoes

unless they give up on him;

a face bruised with September

and measured kicks through corn chip bags

crushed in the side-pockets of this city.

I think of other reasons for these pairs in flight:

maybe a test of gravity, feet got too big,

or a protest against restrictions

on tilted chairs, names gouged on desktops,

on-time, straight lines in the yard.

For weeks I wonder until I stop

to ask a kid from the neighborhood.

We study each other: a black boy,

backpack over left shoulder, pants big enough

for two of him, and a white woman dressed like a teacher

with notepad and loopy earrings. “Because it’s fun, Miss,”

he says, as if the answer were scrawled on the wall

behind me in oversized bubble letters.

And then, “So they remember you when you’re gone.”

I think of the thirteen apartments I’ve lived in

over the last nine years and how I’ve never left anything behind.

I look at the newest pair, think how impractical

to let color fade, perfectly good and out of reach,

an empty walk on sky.

“I done it lots a’times, Miss,” he says with a grin.

I consider how little I know about joy.

What it’s like to throw something up in the air

that’s important, that weighs something, that takes you places—

and not wait for it to come down.