

**Winter, 8 pm**

That night, my town set the world record  
for the most snow angels made simultaneously in one place.  
I watched them from my window, the children,  
who were loud with joy as they unfurled their wings.

Afterwards, I had dinner with my mother, and she  
mentioned that with my studies almost finished  
I should start thinking about marriage. Unsure  
of how long I could keep my secret, I told her the truth:

I was gay. She grew quiet.  
We finished dinner, and after I cleaned the dishes,  
she took me to the living room where our ancestral altar was. She  
gave me matches and I lit the candles. Then she motioned  
for me to kneel in front of the altar. "Pray to them," she ordered,  
and with my hands clasped together, I stared at a picture  
of my great-grandparents. "For how long?" I asked, and she said until  
they forgave me.

*Forgive me for what?* I wanted to shout, but couldn't  
because I was my mother's son.  
She turned off the lights and sat on the couch. I felt  
the candles' brutal heat on my face. Even when I closed  
my eyes, I could see the orange flame and my great-grandparents' portrait  
burning within it. Whenever I fell asleep, my mother  
came from behind and shook me awake and commanded me  
to keep going. This is how I remember her, constantly  
waking me, reminding me that my life was a never ending prayer, asking for  
forgiveness.  
Outside, thousands of snow angels  
were melting.