

Intention to Return

In a past life I was not defined by his death.
... I was not rerouted like a plane through Charlotte.
... I was part of a “nuclear family,” the phrasing
of which appears first in 1924 as “the nuclear family complex.”
... I did not have a complex.
... I smiled for the camera.
... Love accumulated like debt—mindless, habit-forming.
... Similes were balanced equations.
... I had my father’s face, not “you have your *father’s* face.”

In a past life I am on the basketball court behind our apartment
when I hear his footsteps on the asphalt.
(Does it count as a past life if it happened?)

“In a past life” is not supposed to mean your life before tragedy
but an existence altogether unrecognizable, which is maybe
the same thing: my having been a fir tree.

In a past life the stanza above is nonsensical.

In a past life as a fir tree my identity was also *pine*.

In a past life that broke off from this one as I watched
a woman walk off of a plane before the doors
were armed, I almost followed her.

In a past life as that woman, as someone who refused
to comply, as a passenger without baggage, without a story
she answers to exclusively, no one would know me.

In a past life the allure is not who we were but who we are not.

—Callie Siskel