

THE RETURN: CAME HOME ALL THE SAME

Walking into your childhood home after a long journey—
you can smell the washing powder on the air.

You try to fit your personality back into the shape
that it has always taken within these walls.

You don't look the same.

It has been six months.

There is a cake on the table that your mother has made for you.
She has spread jam thickly between the layers.

You decide to wait until they are home.

It would be rude to eat it without them.

You walk up to your bedroom
and the air smells like polish.

You didn't say that you were coming home until last night.

Baking a cake, dusting. That all takes time.

You wonder if they always keep the house spick and span
just in case you decide to show up at their door.

Wishful thinking. Regret. Or not quite—
sadness that it ended up like this.

It would have been so easy
just to acquiesce and fit your life around their plans.

Someone to walk you down the aisle.
Someone to make the speech.

But she meant more to you than their opinions,
and you said you would never return.

Pandemics prompt parental apologies apparently.
New start. *You can even invite her.*

As if it was not an insult not to use her name.
And yet, you lied to your wife and you came home all the same.