

Given Up

1.

You give me their height, their hair. You say
you remember she had cowlicks like I do,

tufts that refuse to lay flat or stay down
even after washing, rinsing, blowing out —

they frame my face like quotation marks,
an open question,

as if something primordial grazed
the side of the mold, a mark, a mistake,

made regardless,
made anyway.

2.

Or is it that I
have cowlicks like her?

She came first,
my mother —

and the word is a dying deer to me,
a car alarm echoing
until it stops.

3.

You met them then,
in a feverish room of light,

when I was three days old
and didn't belong to anyone.

There was simply the unfolding
and signing of a sheet,

 a passing, a transfer,
a blanket held like a gift.

4.

"What do you want to know?"
How do we learn to love

 someone
we didn't know?