

perhaps as the horses clip-clopped on ice
outside his shop, his kisses
smelling of lather and new skin—

25 when she grew too big and round
with his child, with his oompah love,
with his bandstand love, with his brassy love,

and the town dropped its grace notes
of gossip and whispered hiss,
30 he bundled her out of town

with the savings which should have gone
to my mom. But how could you hate him?
My mother did, my father did,

and my grandmother, who bore his neglect.
35 When she was covered in sheets
at her last death,

he flirted with the nurses, bright
as winter birds in spruces
above a bandstand—

40 I'll always remember him in snow, a deep lather
of laughter, the picture
where he took me from my mother

and raised me high, a baby, into the bell
of his sousaphone, as if I were a note
45 he'd play into light—