

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.