

some places stick to our shoes like gum  
we did not shimmy off onto the concrete good enough  
a reminder to how we lived when we try to pick up our feet  
but still felt the old one anchoring us down  
some places stick like plaque to molars,  
like if you took the joy you woke up with this morning  
and tried to scrub it off, only more of that place would be revealed  
for me, this is not a good thing

i do not want my smile to be a hallway,  
i do not want anyone to walk into the dead end of my eyes  
and find a scrap of me standing there  
i do not want my kiss to taste like red  
clay from Carolina ground,  
the swampy heat of the Everglades  
but I guess some places code into the bloodline.

my dad drove me to a rickety group of houses  
in Madison and said this,  
this is where your brother was born  
and this is where the children used to play  
on the playground and this is how me and your mother and brother  
were a place, a family that didn't include you yet  
some places are just like that,  
where your brother was born and you weren't  
and yet still I'm the sibling, the granddaughter,  
the niece from up there where it's cold,  
where there are tall buildings and bustling cities  
somehow the symbiote of the Midwest,  
has integrated itself into me and  
I'm a blast of winter air and foreign for my family  
because I guess some places turn you into them

other places are like the buildup  
of hairs crocheted in a drain  
a problem you made but can't seem to touch,  
too used to water lapping around your ankles  
my mom hadn't touched Madison  
long enough to leave a fingerprint  
and yet when she moved me in she told me,  
this was a hard hard place  
some places are where your mother died  
and you are not sure what killed her  
and like gum  
like plaque  
like grief  
you let that grow into something  
that shouldn't be love, but that is

every place shouldn't be a poem,  
but I cannot unwrite my family  
out of the body of Madison  
i cannot sit in a classroom, and not wonder  
if there is a tile that touched my father's feet  
and mine our sharing, if there is a glance  
of this yawning lake that both my brother and I  
have reclined into, walked past, put a prayer into  
every place I have lived, becomes a ghost peeking  
around the corner of my melancholy,