

SHE FLED

MELANIE
MCCABE

She fled, on foot,

her baby in one arm, a brown grocery bag spilling clothes in the other. The screen door banged behind her and made all of us look up from kickball, through the gnats and wet August air to where she turned our street into a movie, the kind we'd never been allowed to see.

Before we could pivot, glance at each other, we heard the second slam, saw her husband standing on the stoop, hair frantic, a rifle with a telescopic sight clenched in one fist. She saw him, too, and made a sound that seemed less sob than moan,

tried to run faster, spilling colors from the bag she carried, leaving behind her a trail of tiny shirts, a flowered skirt, a pink brassiere. I want to say that he shot the gun—peered down that scope and fired—because in my memory, this is a story of a man who used all

the weaponry he had, but truth be told, he never had to pull that trigger. He covered the ground she'd gained in seconds, shook her hard by the arm that held the bag, which tore and spilled more colors, as well as the folded

squares of cotton diapers,

and then yanked her back down
the street, she and the baby, both crying, her face gray,
her son's purple. From start to finish, it took no more than
two minutes, and then their door was closed, so we could only
listen a long while to the hot

voices, noises, that escaped their open
windows. The clothes stayed in the street until someone's
mother gathered them and laid them, folded, on their steps,
then turned and told all of us, firmly, *Go home*, and so
we went. I wondered, after,

where that woman thought
she had been going when she tore up the street to what seemed
like nowhere, her neat house and yard behind her—
if she thought then that she, too, was going home, instead of fleeing it.