

Goodbye

In my family, it is the word that says everything:
I love you; I want you to come back.

Only in her later years did Mother use the word
proud. That sounded as frothy as *love*.

Once I didn't say *Goodbye* when my parents left
for a long day and into the night for Salt Lake.

As usual, Mother had washed and ironed the temple clothes
before layering them lightly into the two suitcases.

With my sisters and brother, I watched
from the kitchen window for headlights to announce them.

When they didn't come, I knew I wouldn't forgive myself.
Salt Lake was as far away as we'd ever go then.

State Street was a long corridor of sirens.
Once I grew up, I didn't fret so much.

How many times had I practiced, unnecessarily,
being an orphan? Then before she left finally

after all the rehearsals that unhealthy year,
when the family knew she would go and not come back,

we cast unnatural words around casually,
profusely, avoiding our own *Goodbye*,

fearing, perhaps, it would snap the coffin's latch.
We should have owned the word, released its syllables

from our tight tongues like genetic valentines,
the word both warmly complete, and open-ended.

—Marilyn Bushman-Carlton