

Already all the ghosts

ANNE PIPER

Not that everyone's dead yet, but
memory, memories as ghosts, too many
holding sway

and everywhere—

the way perfume in one room
drifts to the others,
or ink dropped in water diffuses—

I don't know what I'm doing anymore.
Hardly thinking, hardly thinking of now.

I dried a dozen sweetheart roses, hung them
in the corner of the doorframe,
forgot them until today.

What were my intentions? My good
intentions? Fashion another shrine
to future ghosts?

The cats sleep on the trunk beneath
the window. We have photos of them as kittens
back when they were contained
to this one room. Back when I
could enter the chambers of my heart
and roam there unafraid.

Remember the games of your childhood?
What they were like for you?

Keep that, keep yourself together,
all of your selves, and not yet
in a flash before your eyes.

There is no mystery these days,
no finding flowers or ten-dollar bills
pressed in the centers of books,
and no redemption, still—

I'm stretching my pale hand toward you,
I'm telling you *stay*.
Not like a dog, or maybe.
I mean it with all respect. *Stay*.

